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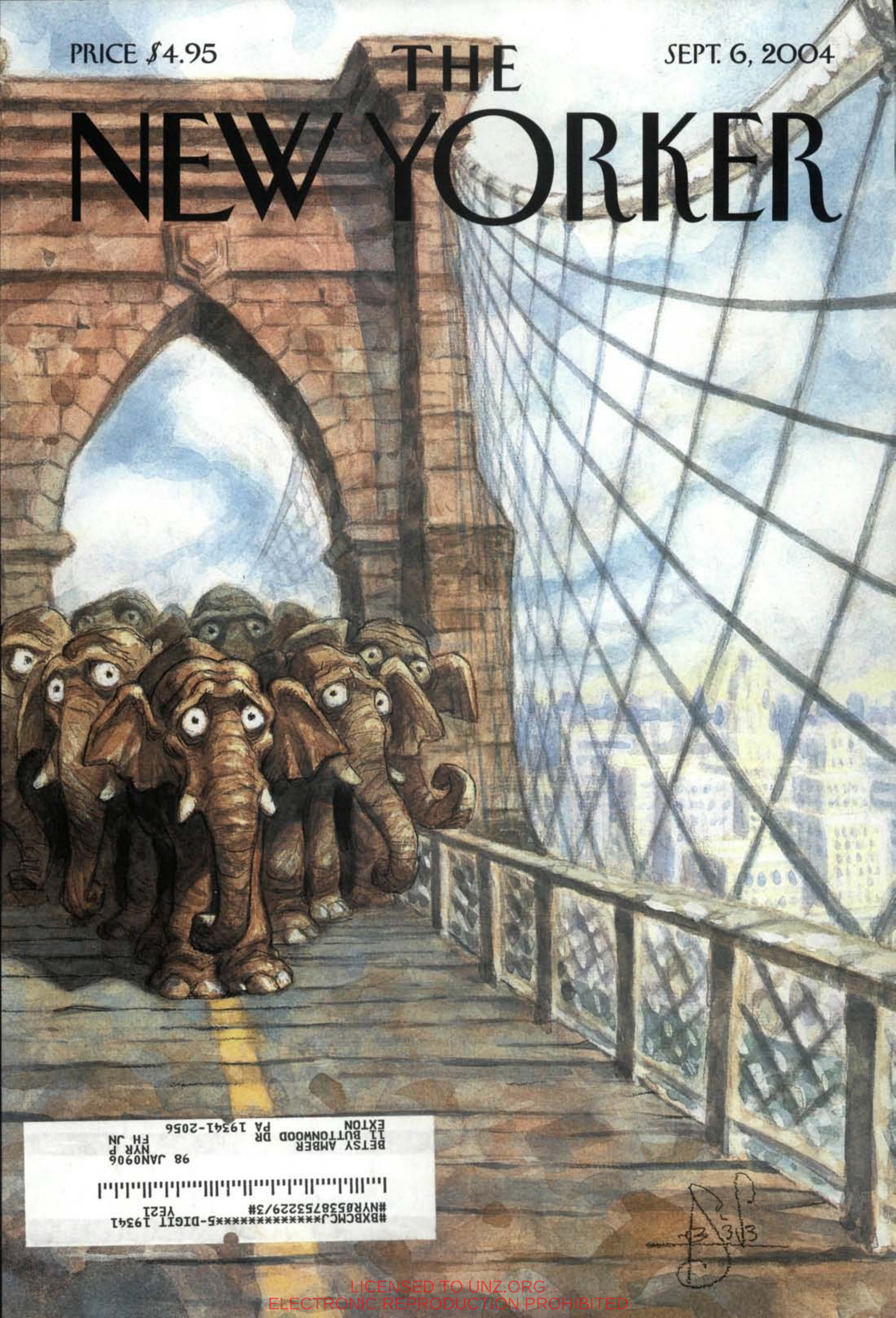

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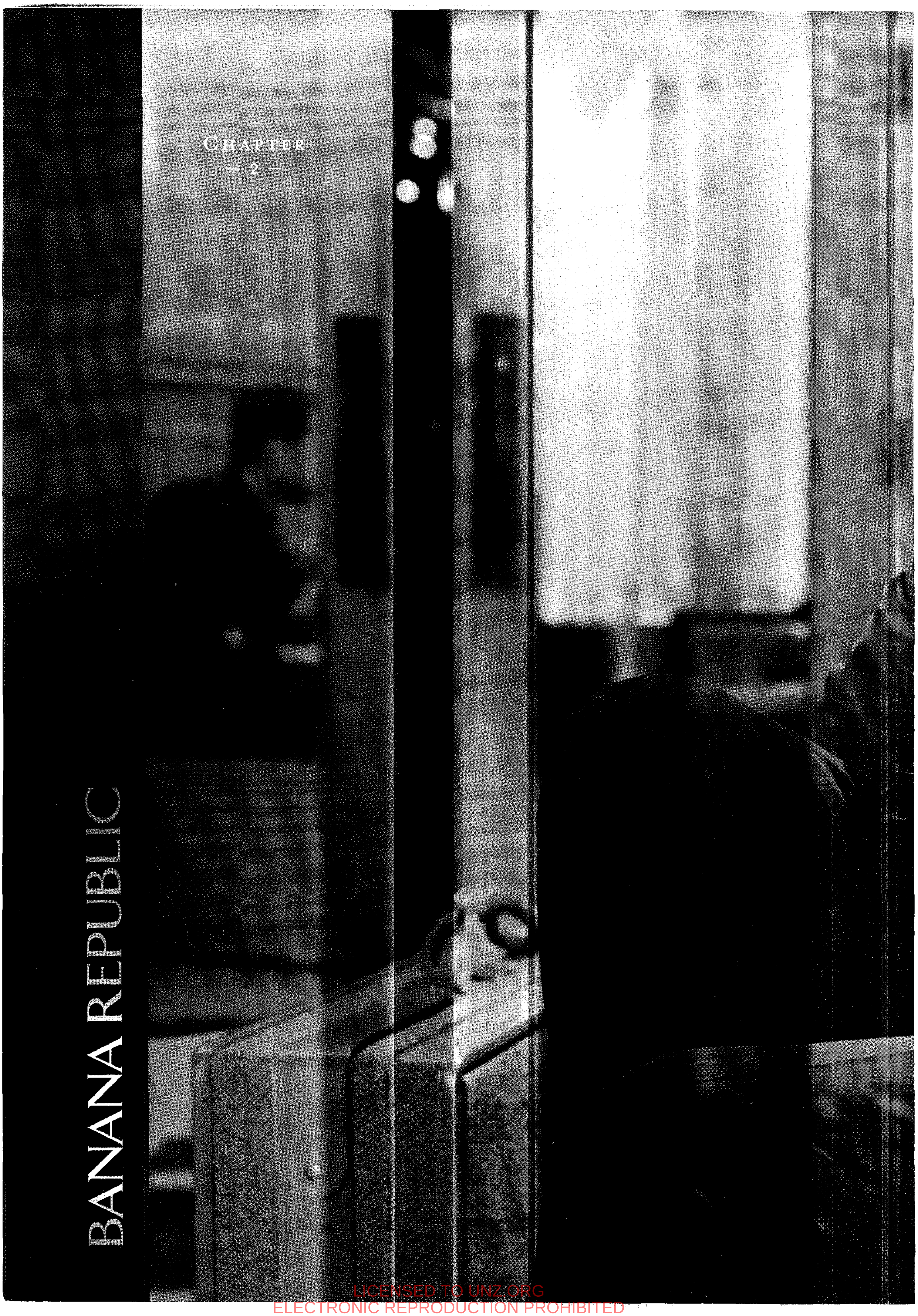

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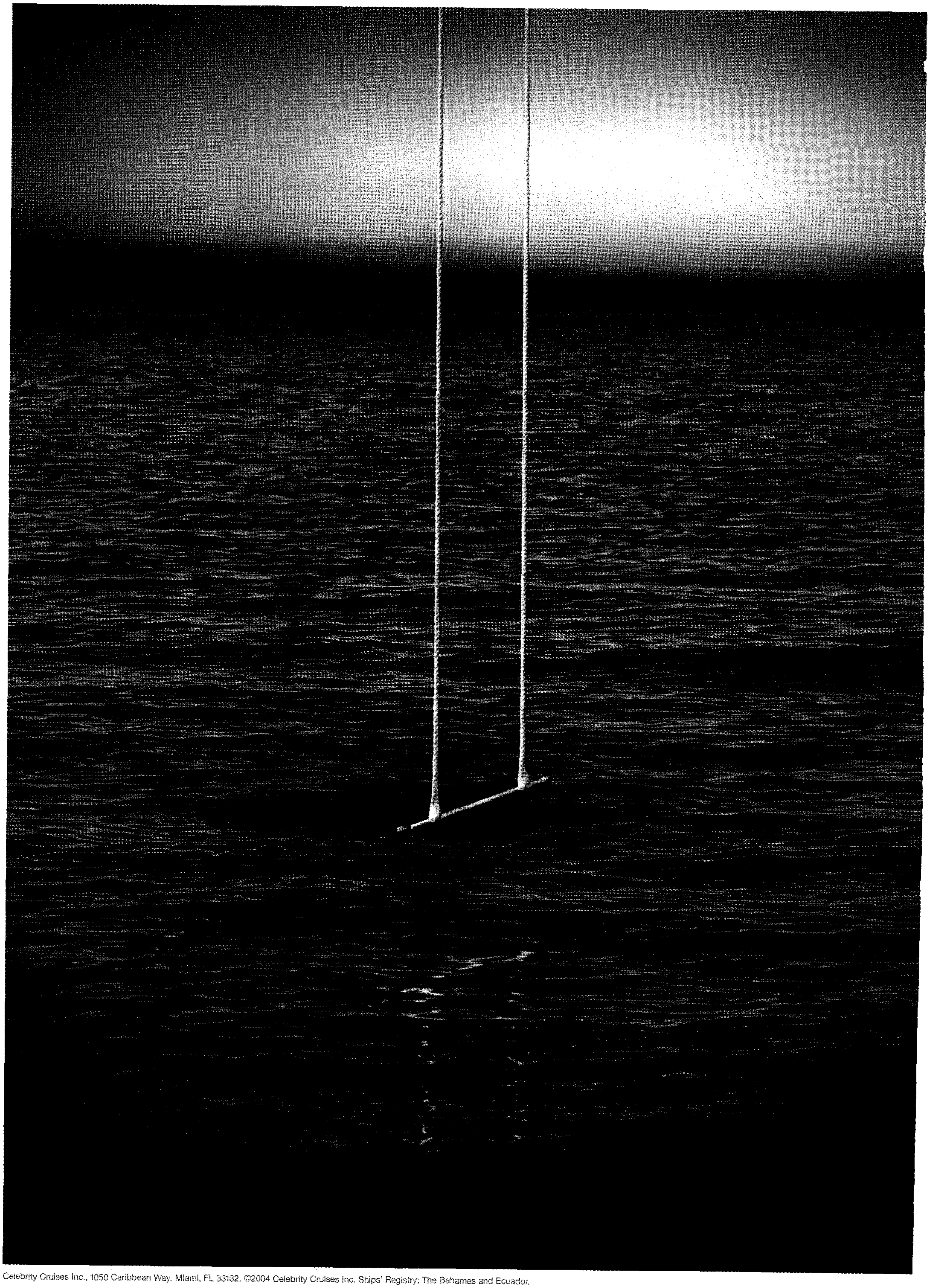

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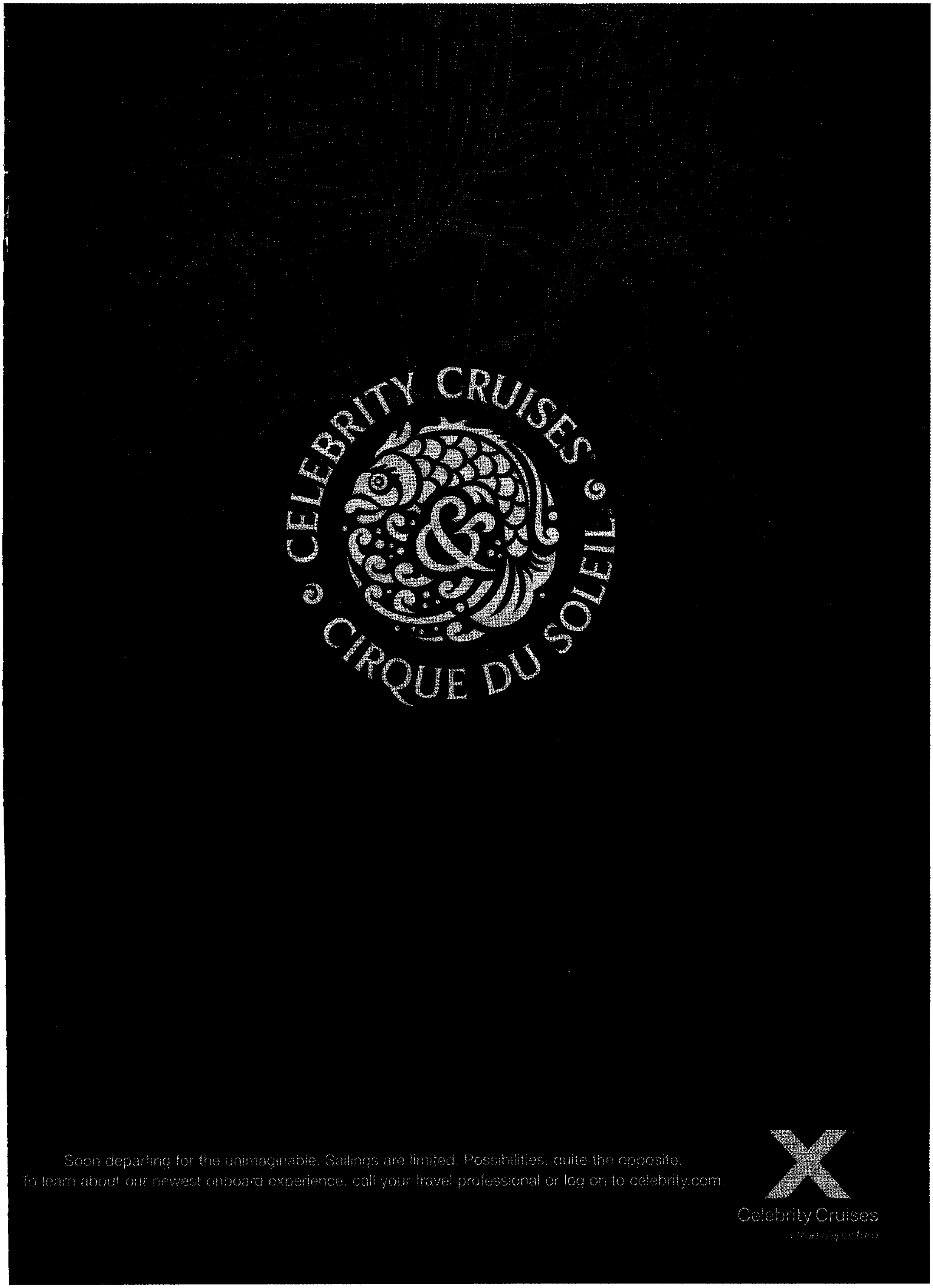
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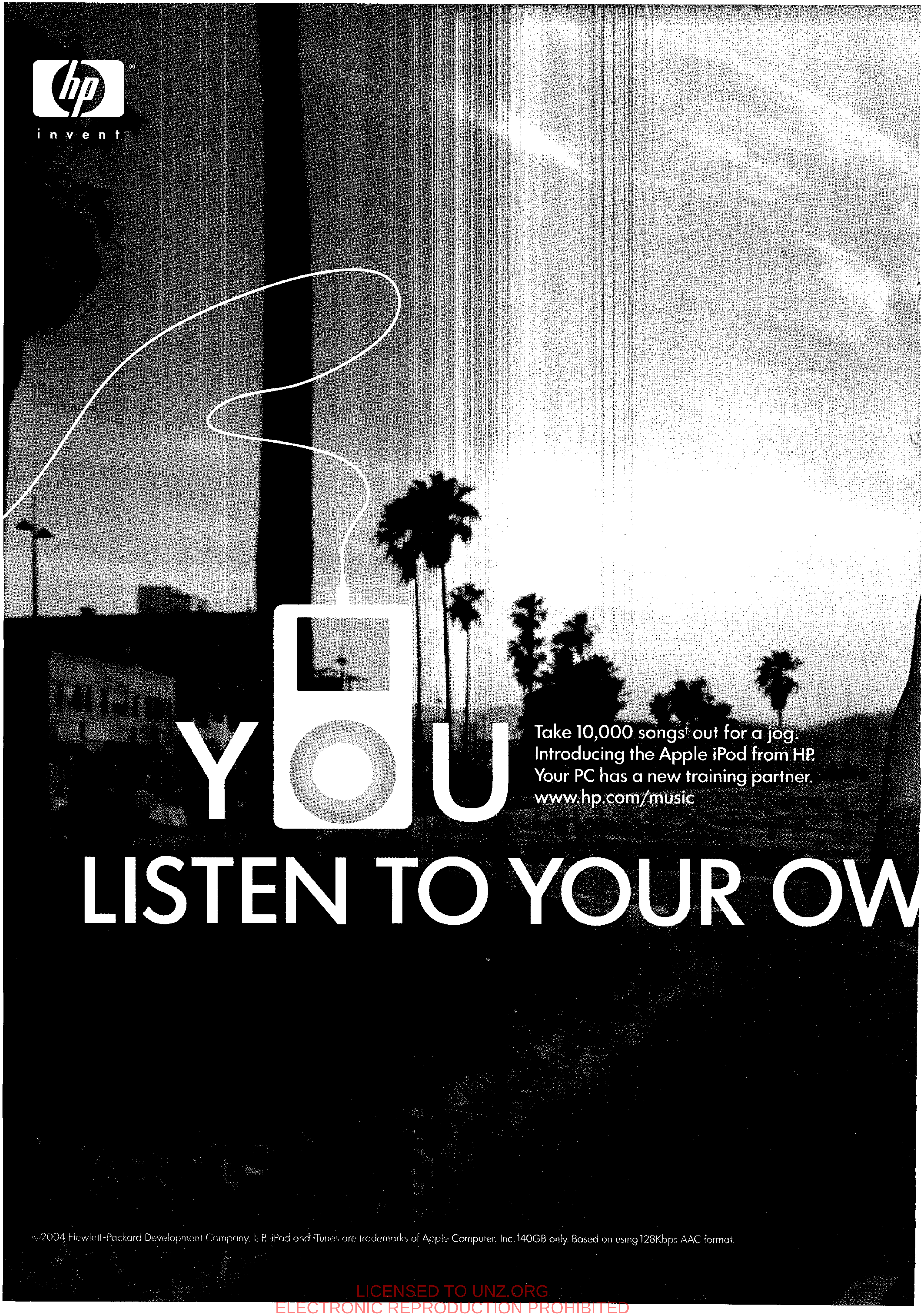

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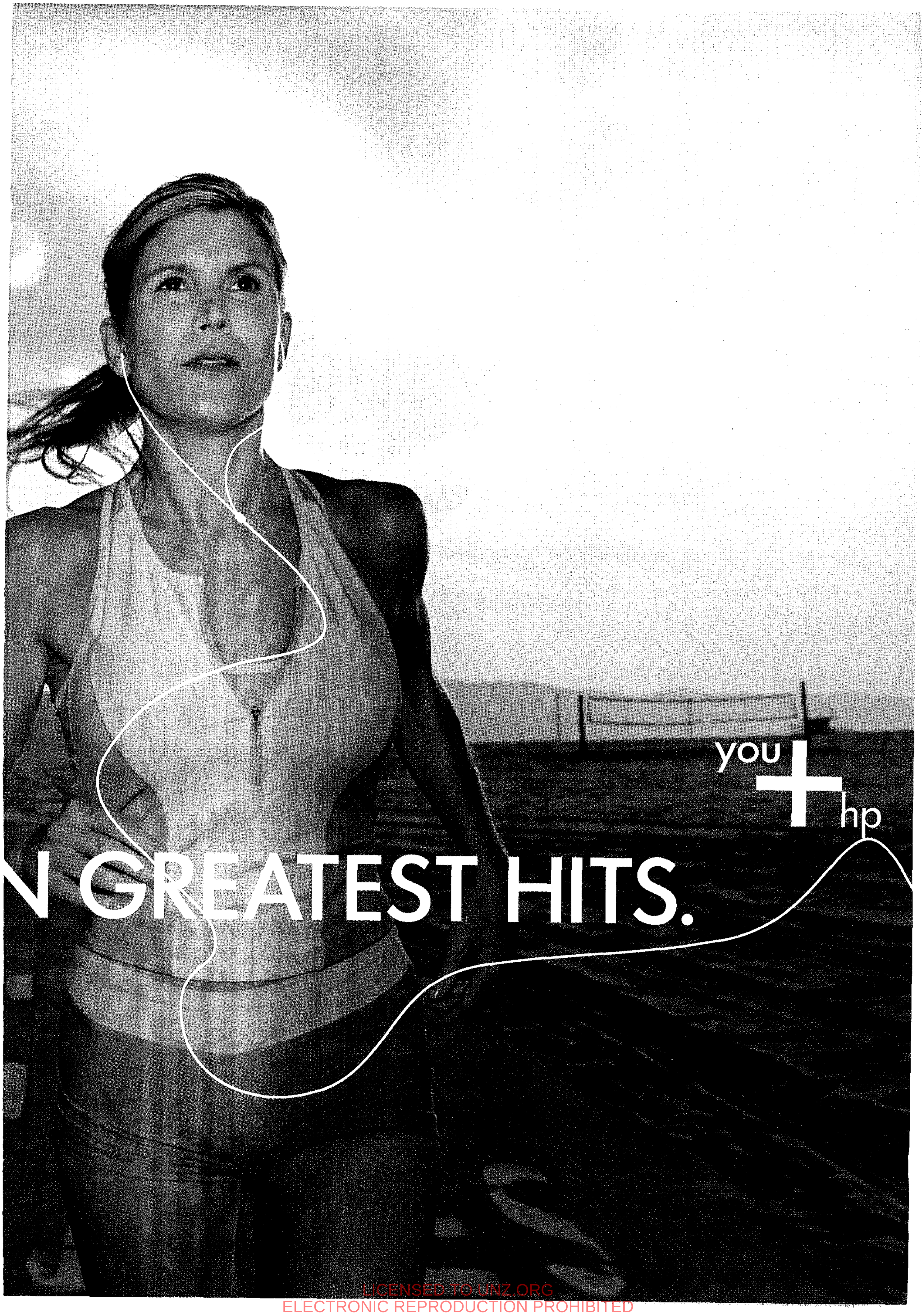
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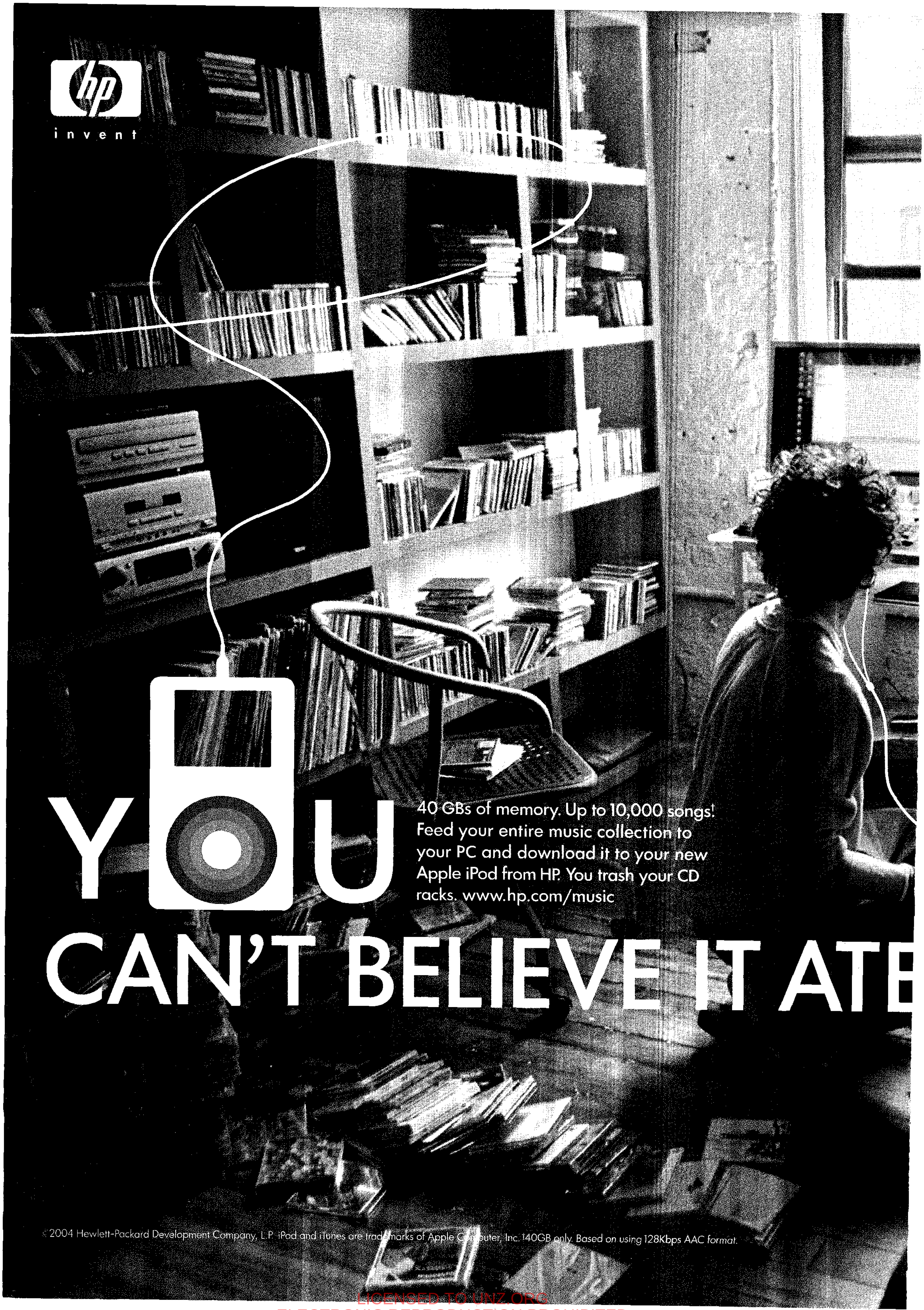

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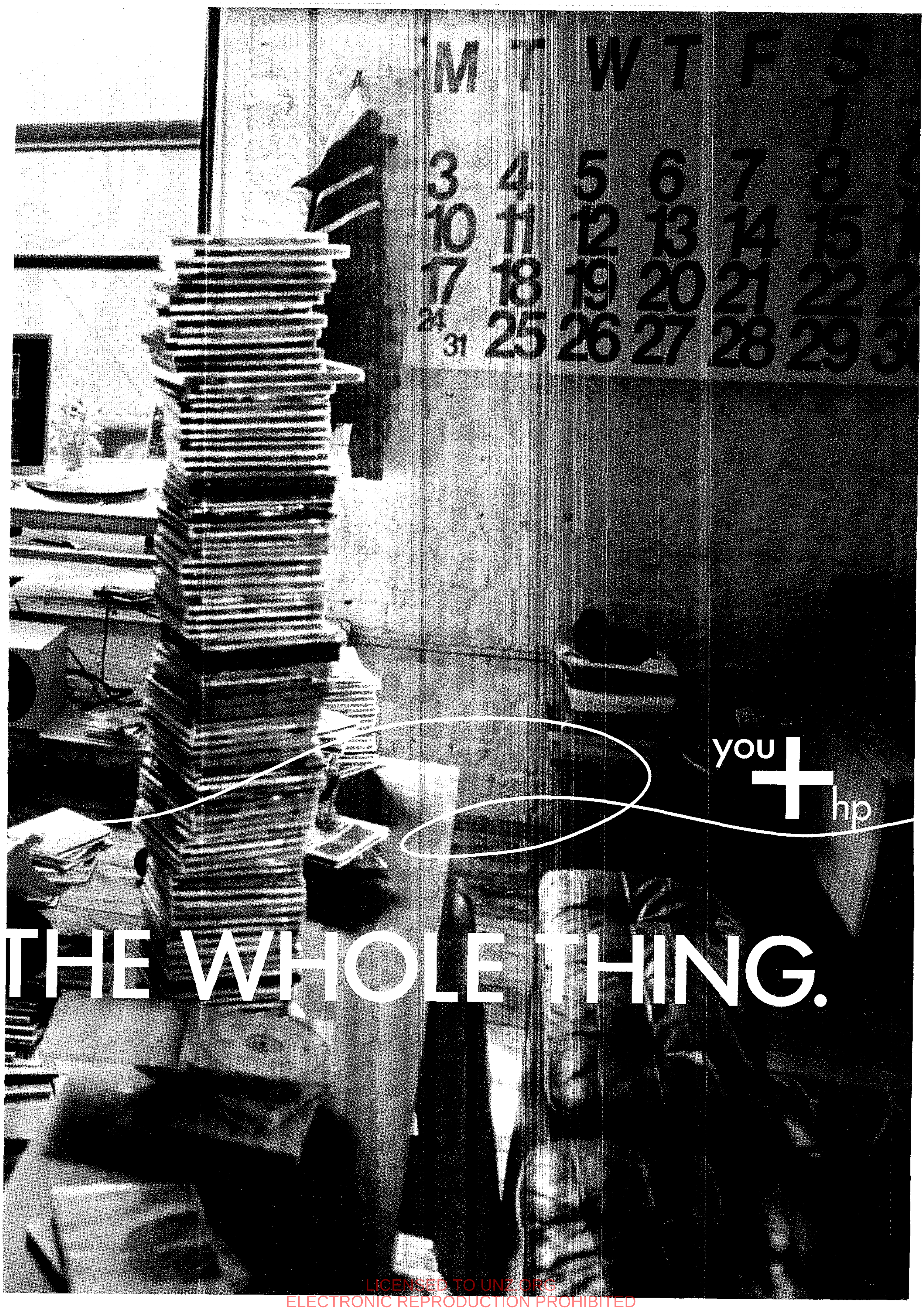
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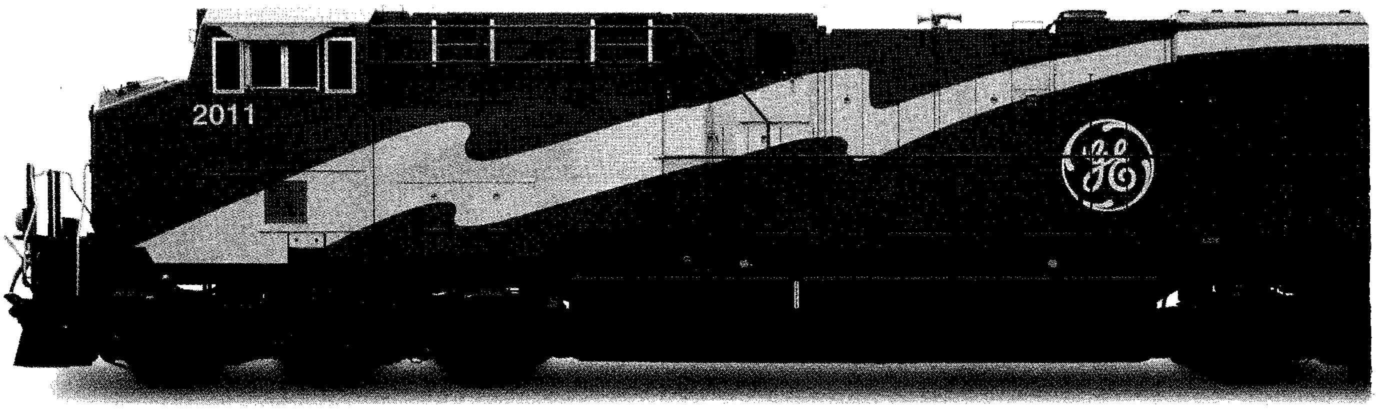

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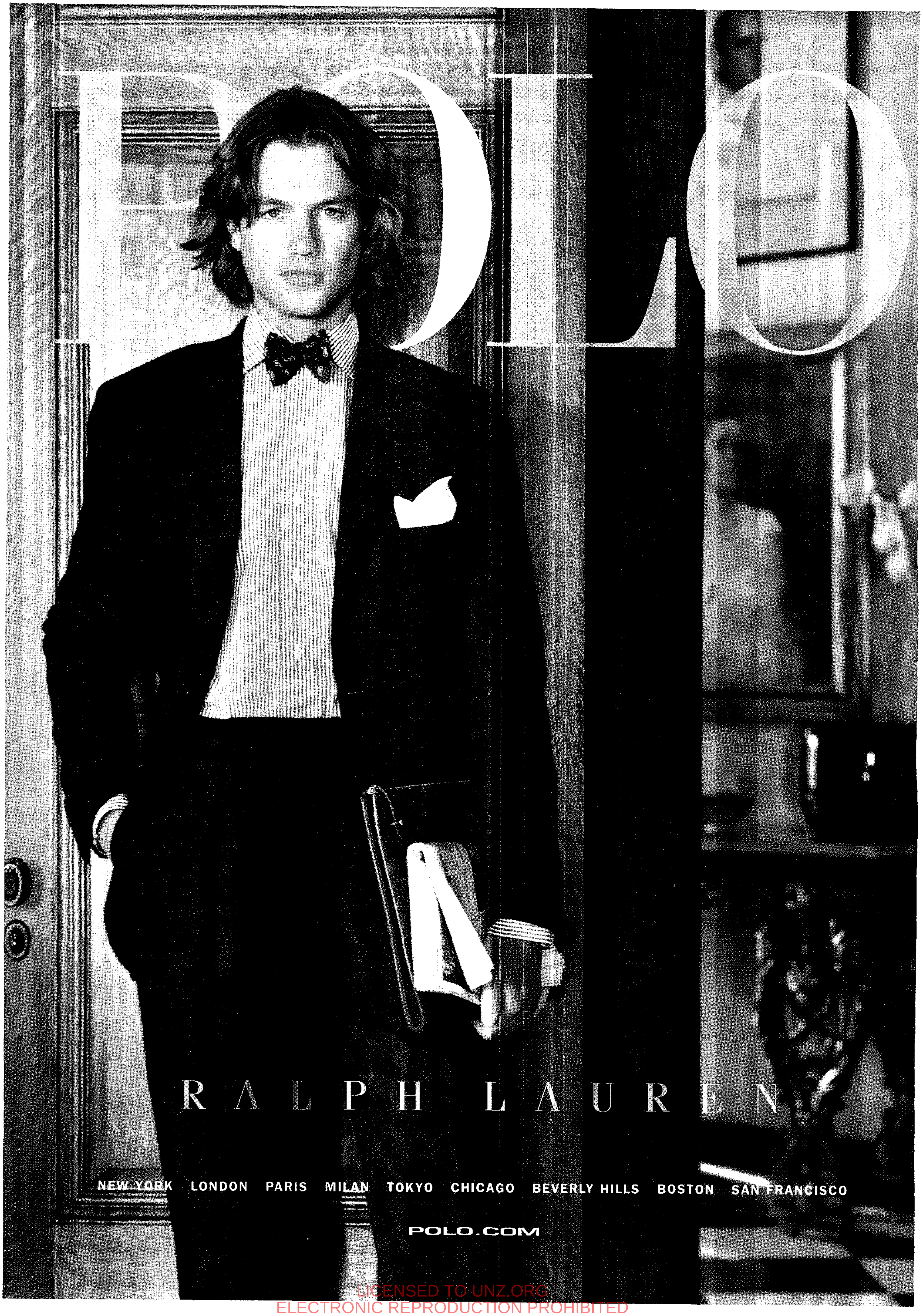
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THE NEW YORKER

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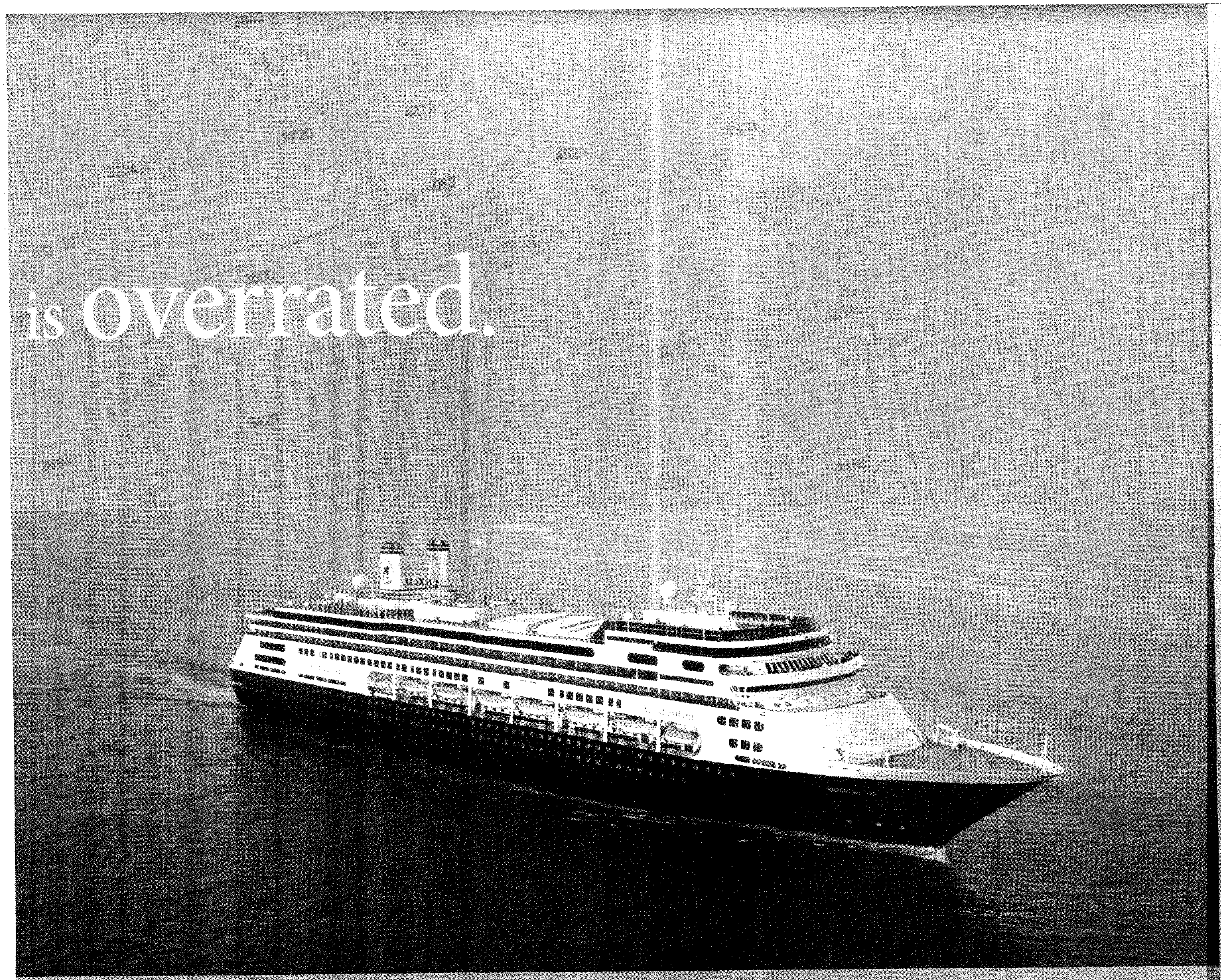

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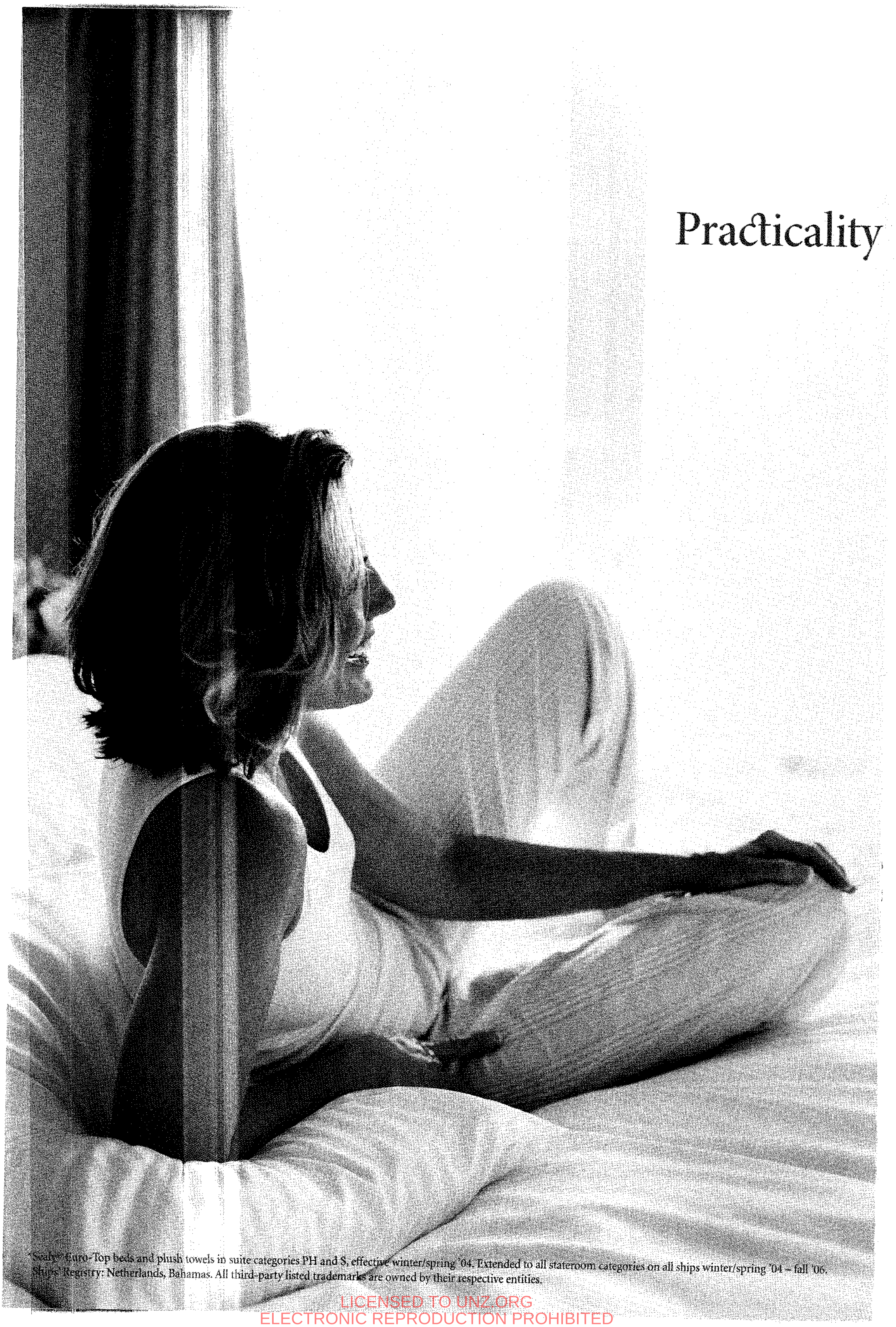

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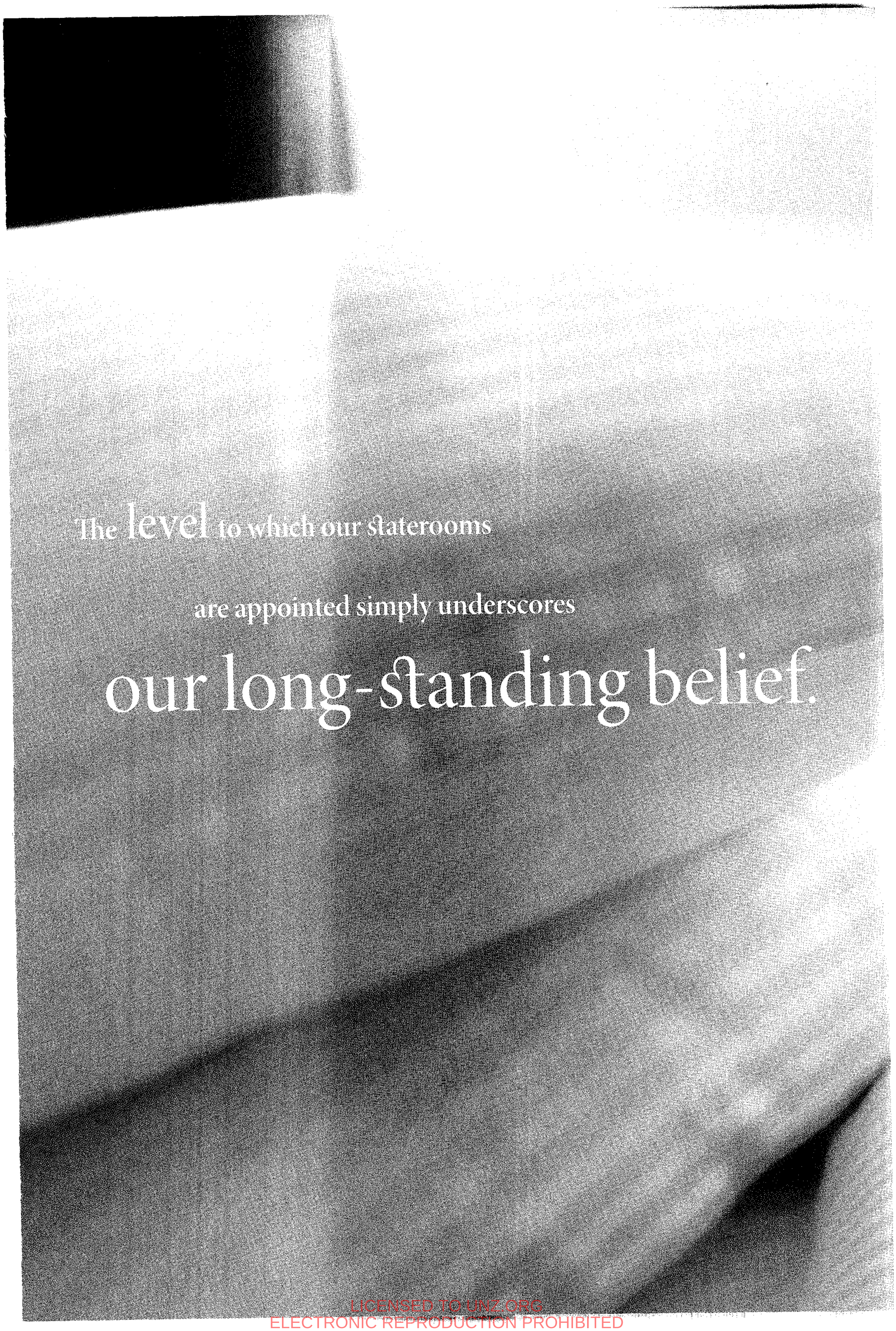
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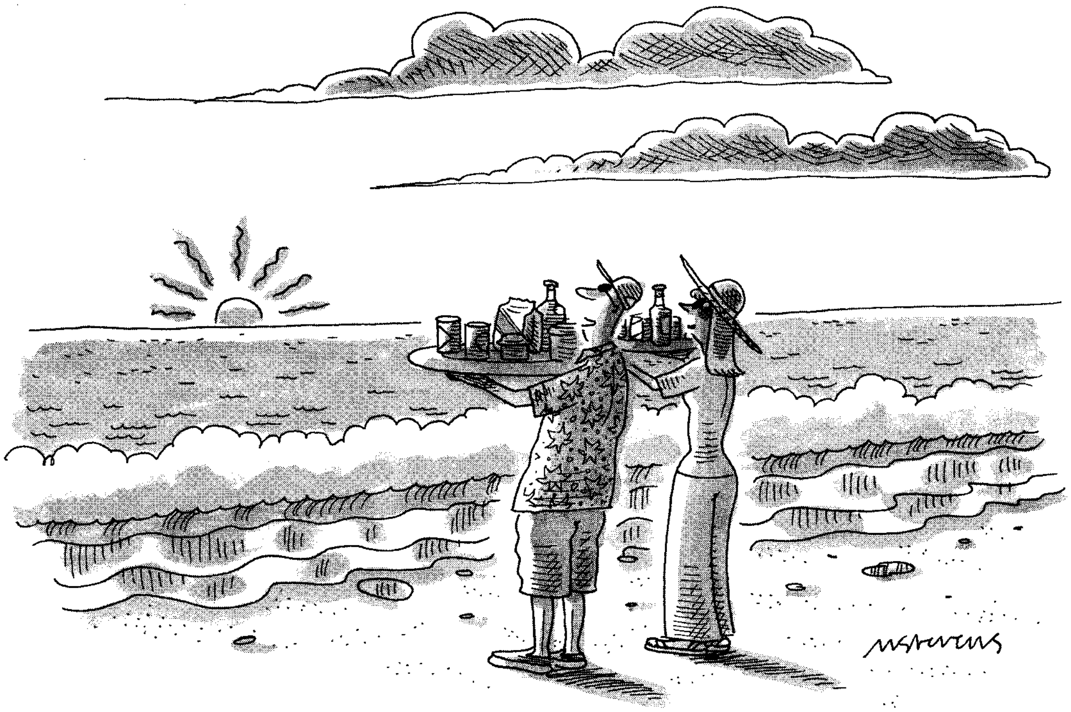

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CONTRIBUTORS

Bill Buford ("The Pasta Station," p. 114) is the author of "Heat: An Amateur Cook's Adventures as Kitchen Slave, Pasta Maker, and Apprentice to a Dante-Quoting Butcher on a Hilltop in Tuscany," which comes out later this year.

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Jim Harrison ("A Really Big Lunch," p. 78) has written fiction and nonfiction. His latest book is "True North," a novel.

Jhumpa Lahiri ("The Long Way Home," p. 83) is the author of "Interpreter of Maladies" and "The Namesake."

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Jerry Adler ("Back to the Future," p. 101) is a senior editor at *Newsweek*.

Yiyun Li ("The Man Who Eats," p. 106) came to the United States from China in 1996. She is the author of "The Princess of Nebraska," which will be published next year.

Malcolm Gladwell ("The Ketchup Conundrum," p. 128) has a new book, "Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking," coming out in January.

Nuruddin Farah ("Bad Taste," p. 123) published his ninth novel, "Links," in March.

Tony Earley ("Sweet Corn," p. 133) is the author of "Jim the Boy," a novel.

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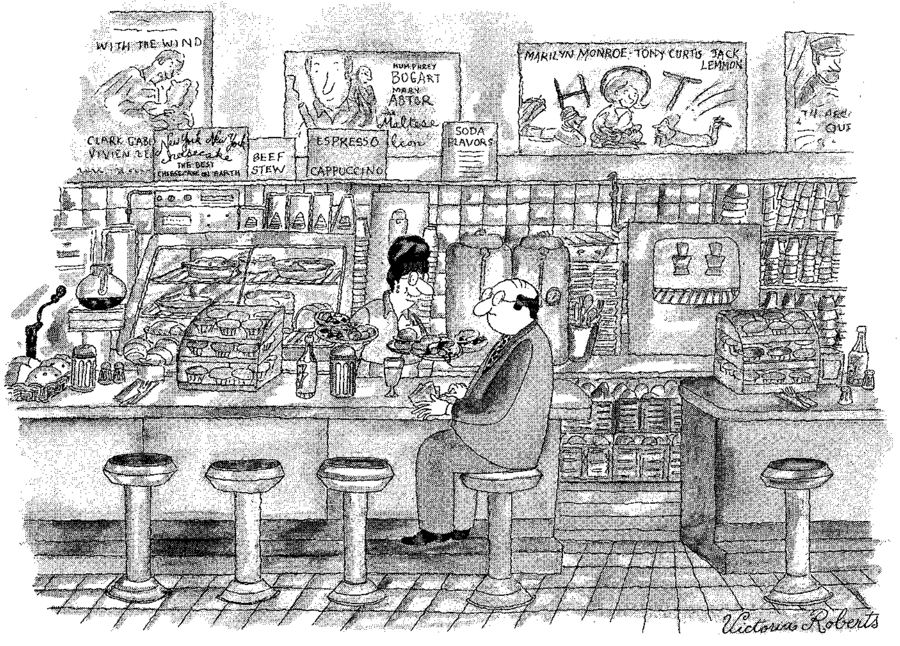
Gabrielle Hamilton ("Killing Dinner," p. 172) is the chef and owner of the New York restaurant Prune. ♦



"*Was it you, honey, who ordered the tasting menu?*"

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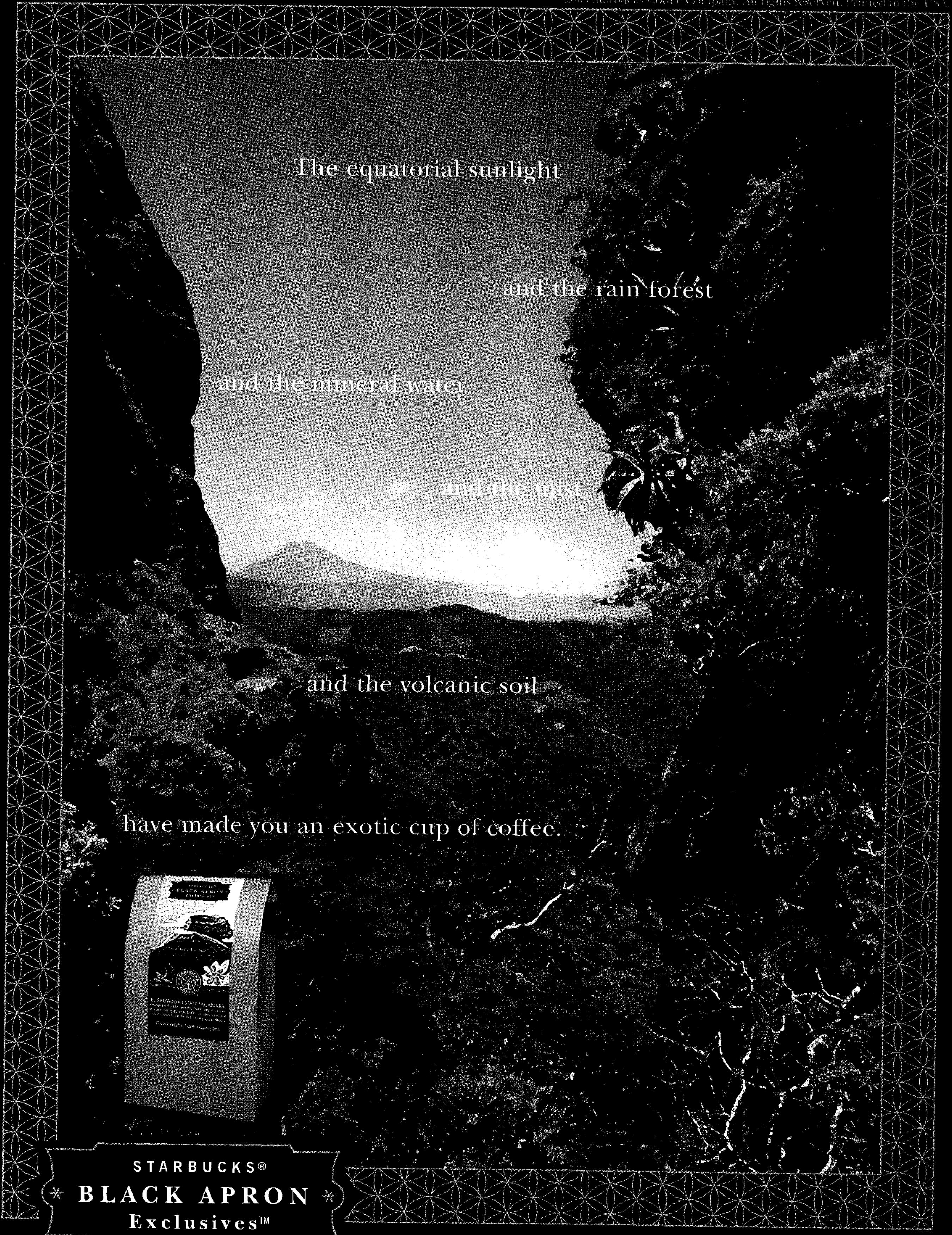
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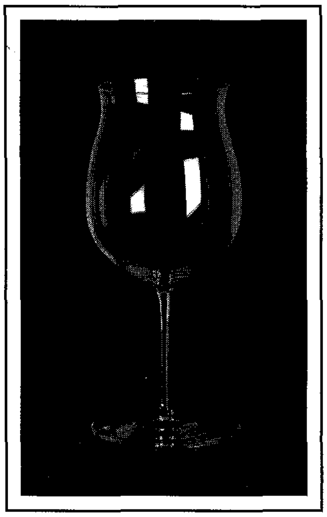

While the debate continues over real or perceived dangers of lead in crystal glassware, some authorities have issued regulations or advisories on the subject.

California law mandates retailers to post a warning wherever a consumer product contains an ingredient that may cause cancer or birth defects. One of the products requiring this warning is lead crystal—though some critics say the law goes too far.

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THE FALLEN

Dan Baum's portrayal of the sensitive, honorable treatment of America's war dead is a reminder of how fundamentally decent this nation is, and that its armed forces are staffed by courageous young men and women ("Two Soldiers," August 9th & 16th). I cried when I read his piece; it gave me a chance, finally, to mourn our fallen soldiers. We as a nation have a right to know just how these affairs are handled, and that the Army does everything necessary, including breaking the news of a young soldier's death to his family, with all the respect and dignity possible.

Jim Parks
Clifton, Tex.

As I read "Two Soldiers," it occurred to me that if George W. Bush and Donald Rumsfeld spent a few days with the Army's Mortuary Affairs unit at one of their "collection points" they might not be as eager as they are to play with guns.

Donald McEachren
Los Angeles, Calif.

WHO NEEDS FREE TRADE?

Free trade does mean, as John Cassidy suggests, that some low-wage workers in the Third World will gain a comparative advantage over high-wage workers in the United States ("Winners and Losers," August 2nd). The result is that, at the price of lower wages for Americans, hundreds of millions of people overseas who were formerly at the edge of subsistence are propelled into prosperity. Seen in this light, globalization, by helping the least advantaged people on the planet, does more to achieve the principle of distributive justice, as articulated by the philosopher John Rawls, than all the foreign-aid programs ever devised. Wage competition from abroad is a bad thing only if "our" workers somehow matter more, as human beings, than people in India or China. Meanwhile, the efficiency gains from shifting work to the Third World result in lower-priced goods and services for all—including those of "us" who now earn less.

Jeffrey Friedman
Assistant Professor of Political Science
Barnard College
New York City

Cassidy illustrates the basic problem when macroeconomics and politics mix: the former is unconcerned with wealth distribution; the latter is driven by it. Proponents of free trade presume that it would create sufficient jobs to replace those lost. But, as Cassidy points out, the replacement jobs are inferior; most are in the service sector. If these are the jobs of the future, the federal government must help make service-sector jobs real alternatives for displaced workers—by providing essential benefits, like health care, associated with well-paying, career-based employment. It should also subsidize higher education and make child care affordable to someone earning minimum wage. How to pay for this? That's where wealth distribution comes in. If economists like N. Gregory Mankiw are right, there are always winners in free trade—even if it's just a few big winners. These gains are possible only at the expense of others. So the winners, through taxation, need to help the losers in kind.

Uri Emerson-Fleming
Los Angeles, Calif.

Most of the newly employed workers overseas who are benefitting from outsourcing and offshoring are producing goods and services for the U.S. market. As wages here are pressed downward—to the point where, as Cassidy points out, "eventually, workers in both places end up earning the same amount"—who will buy the goods?

Paul Sack
San Francisco, Calif.

•

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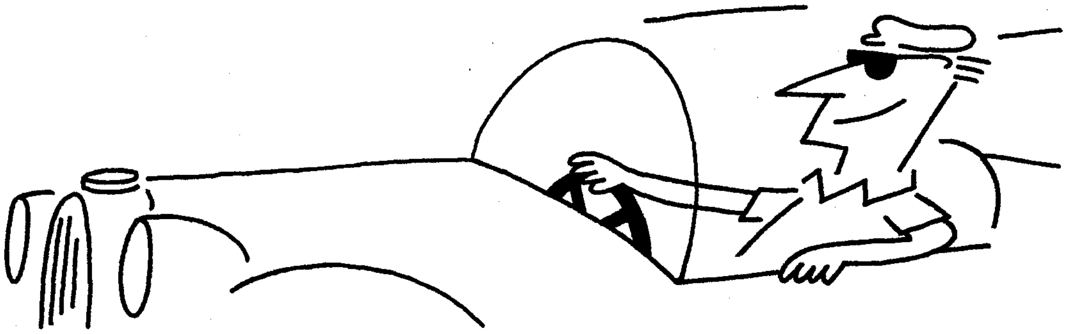

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THIS WEEK
CABARET WITH KENT

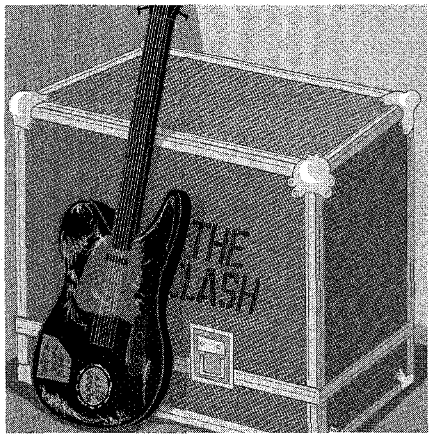
The cabaret world is dominated by personality-driven performers whose ability to seduce audiences—or, in some cases, to overpower them—often camouflages their lack of vocal skills. But Stacey Kent is a real singer, with a stunning tone and subtle phrasing that rejuvenate even the oldest standards. She doesn't skimp on the charm, either. She has an easy interplay with her band, which includes her husband, the saxophonist Jim Tomlinson. Kent starts her fourth consecutive appearance at the Oak Room with "Americans in Paris," a celebration of Cole Porter, George Gershwin, Lerner and Loewe, and other composers. (Starting Sept. 7; see Night Life.)

LONDON SCREENING

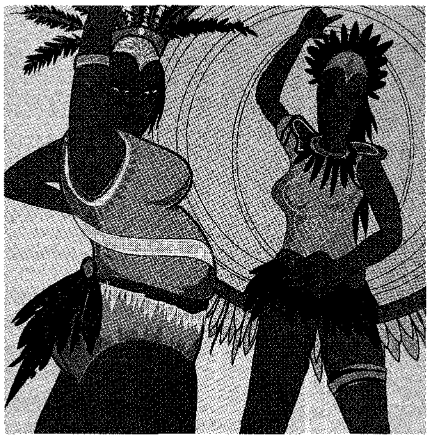
BAM Rose Cinemas is screening a series of films chosen for their soundtrack. The unclassifiable "Rude Boy," part documentary and part drama, ostensibly follows the fortunes of a Clash fan who becomes a roadie for the band, but its raison d'être is to provide a showcase for several incendiary Clash performances. In 1980, the band was in its prime, raw and relevant, and apparently none too happy about being on camera. At one point, the drummer, Topper Headon, attacks the actor playing the roadie. Also showing this week: Martin Scorsese's "Casino," whose relentless use of music to illuminate the darker facets of its characters foreshadows "The Sopranos," and James William Guercio's motorcycle-cop cult favorite, "Electra Glide in Blue." (Sept. 4; see Movies.)

CARNIVAL IN SEPTEMBER

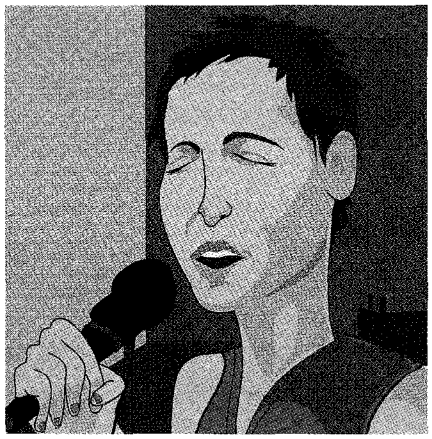
Carnival is traditionally a late-winter fête, the last chance to indulge before Lent. New York, for reasons of its own, holds the holiday on Labor Day. Now in its thirty-seventh year, the West Indian-American Day Carnival Parade will fill Brooklyn's Eastern Parkway with crowds, bands, spectacular costumes, and the aroma of jerk chicken. (Sept. 6; see Above and Beyond.)



"Rude Boy," a film about the punk band the Clash, at BAM Rose Cinemas.



The West Indian-American Day Carnival Parade, in Brooklyn.



The cabaret singer Stacey Kent, appearing at the Oak Room.

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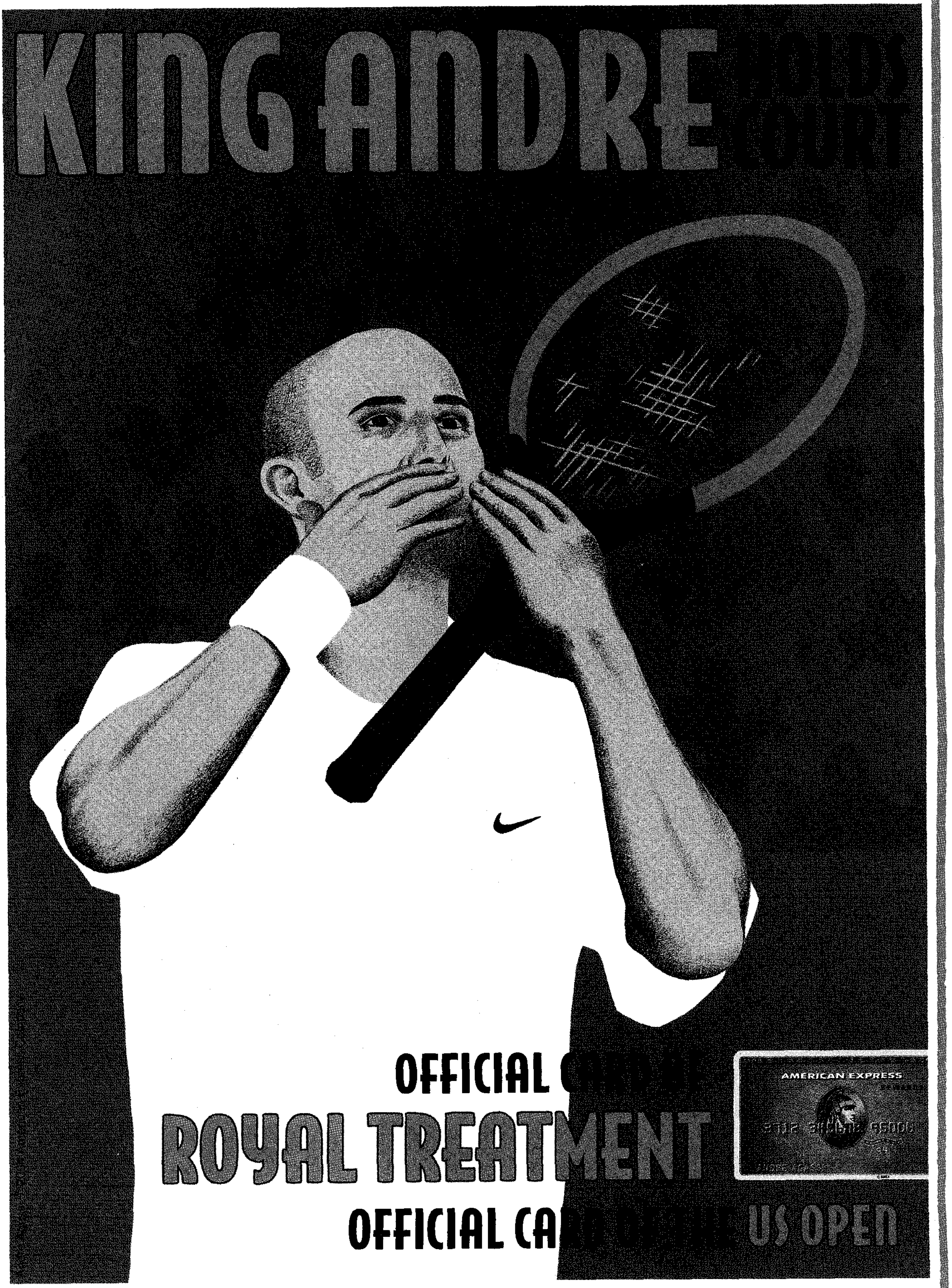
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ATLANTIC THEATRE COMPANY
The fall season opens with two one-act plays by Eugène Ionesco, "The Bald Soprano" and "The Lesson," in new translations by Tina Howe. Featured in the cast are John Ellison Conlee ("The Full Monty"), Michael Countryman, Seana Kofoed, Jan Maxwell, and Steven Skybell. Directed by Carl Forsman. Previews begin Sept. 1. (336 W. 20th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE OLDEST PROFESSION
The Signature Theatre Company's new season is dedicated to the works of Paula Vogel. It starts off with a comic drama, set during the early days of the Reagan Administration, about five aging bawds who struggle with arthritis and a diminishing clientele. Directed by David Esbjornson. In previews. (Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

PEOPLE BE HEARD
Erica Schmidt ("Debbie Does Dallas") directs a new musical comedy, with songs by Quincy Long and music by Michael Roth, about a small town caught up in a heated debate about evolution. Choreographed by Peter Pucci. In previews. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

SLAVA'S SNOWSHOW
In this seriocomic spectacle by the Russian clown Slava Polunin, hobo clowns perform existential antics, culminating in a giant paper snowstorm that blows across the stage and onto the audience. In previews. (Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 212-505-0700.)

STRAIGHT ON 'TIL MORNING
Writer Trish Harnetiaux and director Jude Domski, who collaborated on the quirky comedy "Inside a Bigger Box" in 2003, team up again to present a satirical update of "Peter Pan," set among Williamsburg scenesters who never want to grow up. Previews begin Sept. 3. (78th Street Theatre Lab, 236 W. 78th St. 212-868-4444.)

SYMPHONIE FANTASTIQUE
The puppeteer Basil Twist's dreamlike work—set to Berlioz's hour-long, five-movement composition and performed in a thousand-gallon glass tank—comes to the brand-new Dodger Stages. In previews. (340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

OPENED RECENTLY

AFTER THE FALL
Arthur Miller's play, which premièred in 1964, three years after the end of his marriage to Marilyn Monroe and two years after her spectacular flameout and death, marked a departure for the playwright, stretching his technical and intellectual boundaries. A sprawling work, less conventionally structured than his earlier plays, it is set in 1962 in the transit lounge of the old Idlewild Airport, within the "mind, thought, and memory" of its protagonist, Quentin, a twice-divorced lawyer whose conscience struggles against the uniform thinking of the mob—here composed almost entirely of women. In the Roundabout's revival, the director, Michael Mayer, has given the play new form by cutting it down, giving it a shape that is close to that of "Death of a Salesman." Unfortunately, even with the cuts, Peter Krause, as Quentin, just isn't up to the task of making this academic language live. A remarkably thin actor, he's a blank sheet of paper that resists emotion and ideas. But Carla Gugino's Maggie (presumably based on Marilyn Monroe) is a revelation. Her performance, along with Mayer's direction, makes "After the Fall" worth revisiting, like a dark garden filled with the intoxicating scents of decay and hope. (Reviewed in our issue of 8/9 & 16/04.) (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300. Through Sept. 12.)

BOMBAY DREAMS
One of the silliest musicals in recent memory. In this British import, the "scum from the slum" Akaash (Manu Narayan) gets discovered by a zaftig Bollywood diva, Rani (the hard-shaking Ayesha Dharker), and becomes a star. Over the course of nine production numbers, Akaash briefly forgets his roots, but not, unfortunately, the lyrics, by Don Black, including those of the show's hit song, "Shakalaka Baby," whose most eloquent passage goes, "Shakalaka baby shakalaka baby / Come and shakalaka with me." (5/10/04) (Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 212-239-6200.)

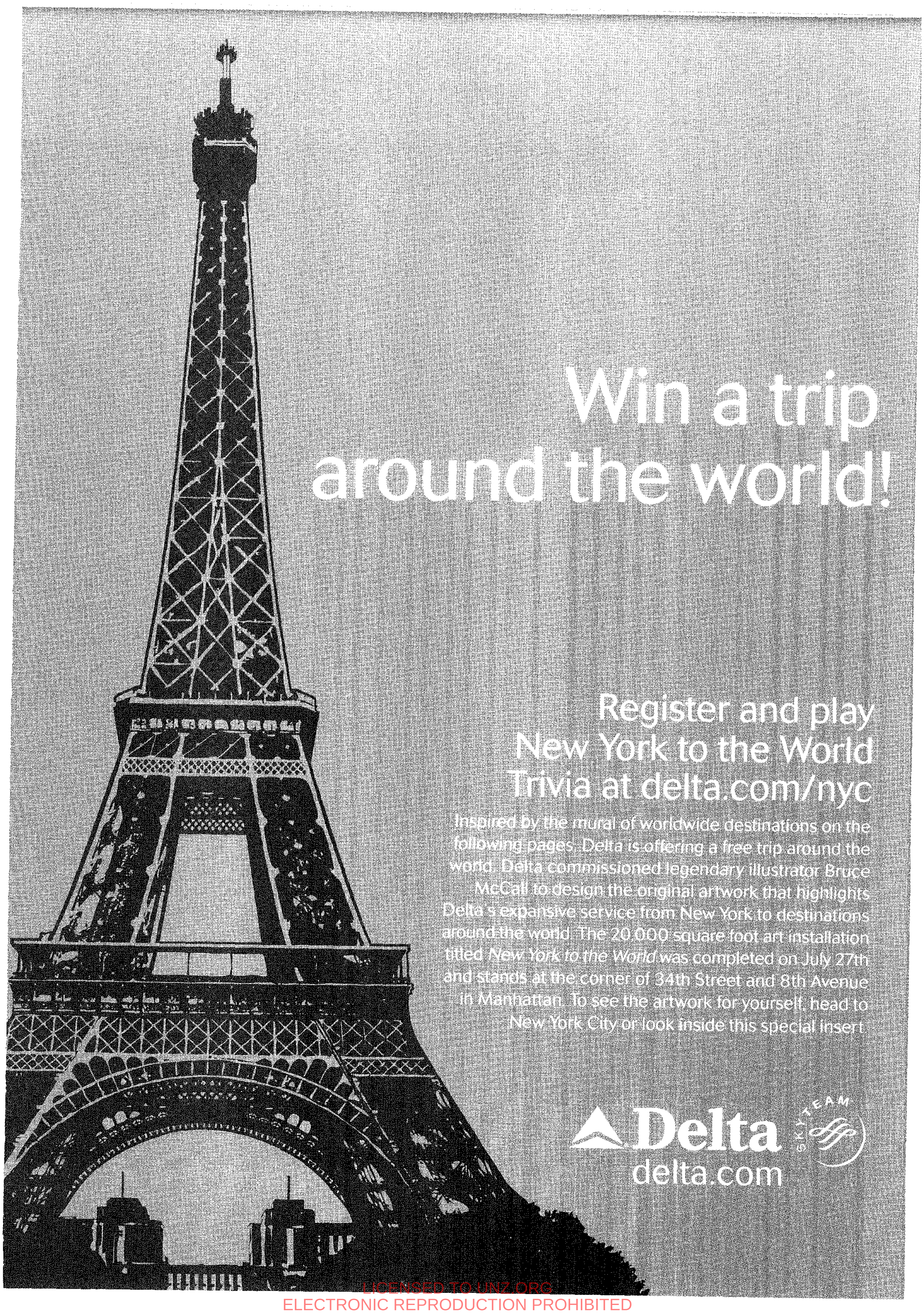
THE BOY FROM OZ
The charming, wildly hardworking performer Hugh Jackman has been put in the awkward position of having to prove that the Australian singer-songwriter Peter Allen—who was discovered by Judy Garland and who married her daughter Liza Minnelli—is worthy of our attention. Just this side of overly hunky, Jackman does everything he can to sell the show, and the girls in the audience love him. Now in its final weeks, the show continues to draw starstruck fans, who lie in wait outside the stage door. (10/27/03) (Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. Closes Sept. 12.)

BRYAN DYKSTRA: CORNERED & ALONE
The local comedian launches a fearless attack on the current Administration. Directed by Margarett Perry. (Triad, 158 W. 72nd St. 212-352-3101.)

BUG
This play, written by Tracy Letts and directed by Dexter Bullard, is never exactly what it seems. It begins deceptively simply, in a residential hotel somewhere near Oklahoma City, in a town God may or may not have forsaken. Agnes White (Kate Budke), who works as a bartender, stands at the door to her small, dingy room. Before long, a friend shows up with a little distraction—a guy named Peter

The street-basketball tournament started by Earl (the Goat) Manigault runs through September 4 (see Above and Beyond).

MONTE ISOM



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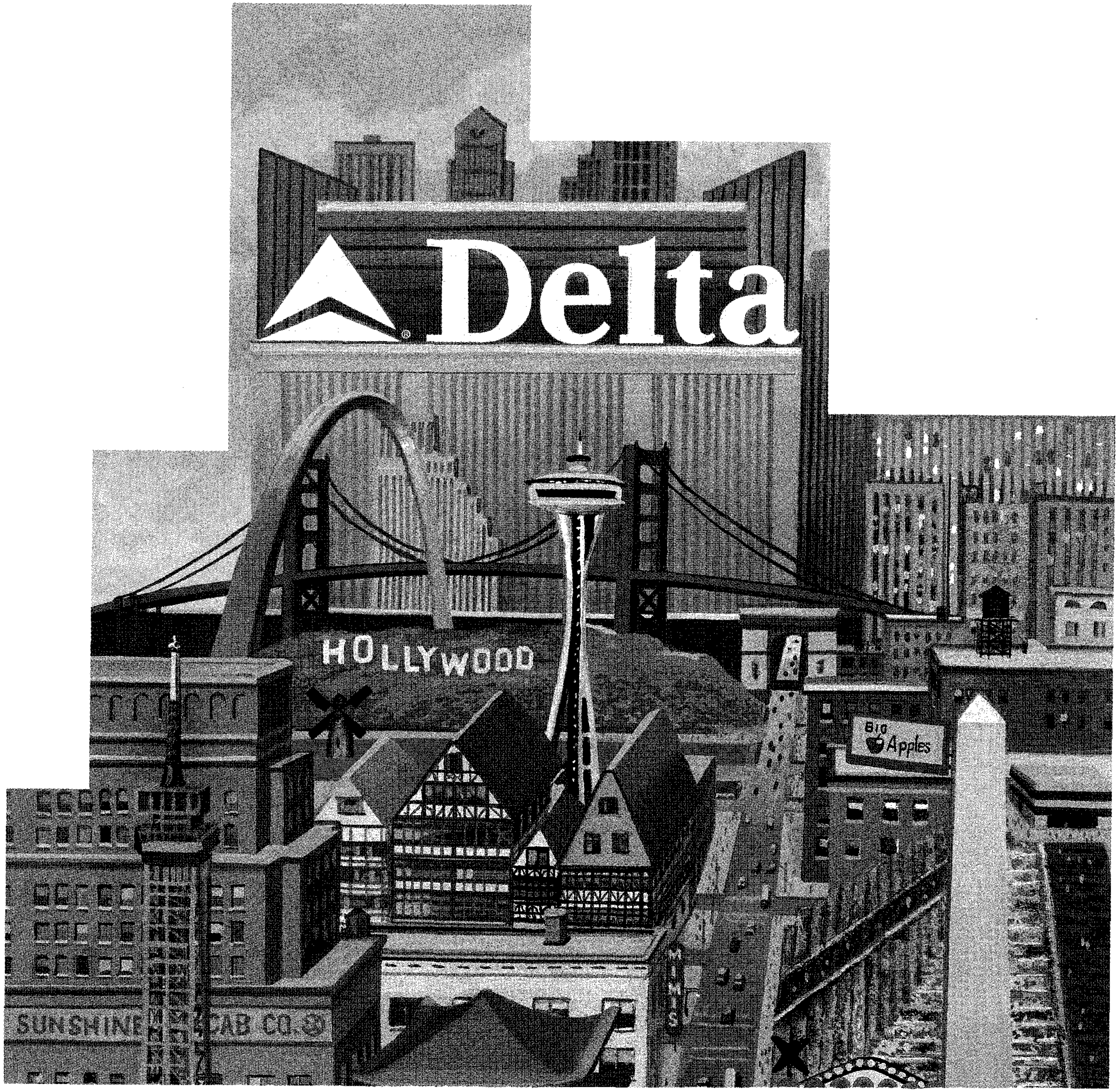
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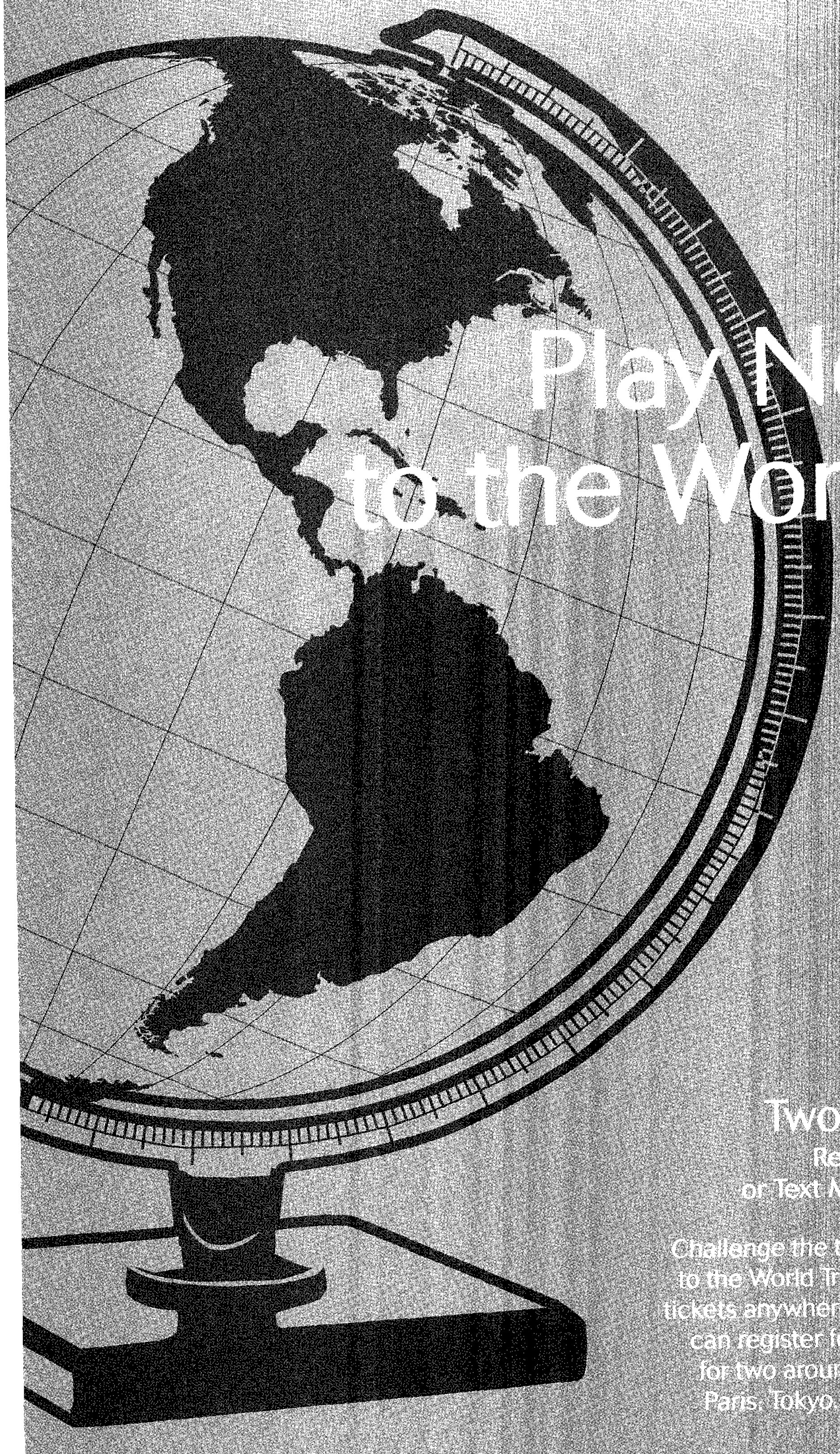

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KNISHES
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BRUCE McCALL

New York to the World

Original artwork by Bruce McCall

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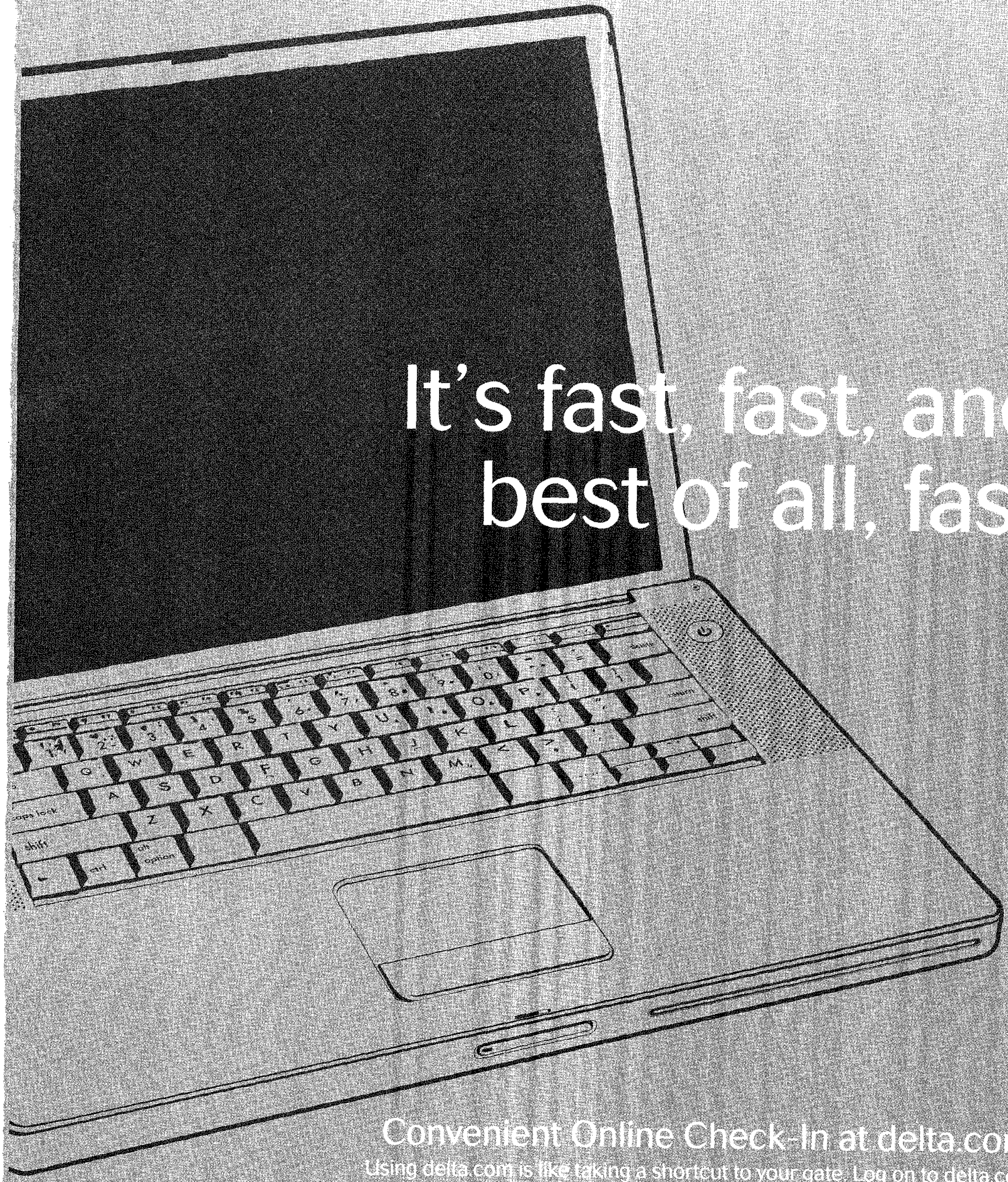

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TABLES FOR TWO

BEPPE
45 E. 22nd St. (212-982-8422)—No New Yorker can ever be sure that the French bistro he loves is the best one in town, and even the patron of the currently trendy one-word restaurant knows that it will be replaced by another trendy one-word restaurant: Craft awaits its Cunning, which in time will meet its Doom. But every New Yorker's favorite Italian restaurant is the best Italian restaurant there has ever been. Partisans of 50 Carmine or one of Mario Batali's joints are as ferocious in their certainties as Republican attackwomen, and no Italian restaurant in New York has more fervent partisans than Beppe.

Cesare Casella, the owner and chef, greets visitors at the door, in his chef's whites, graced—in a note that first seems comic, then wonderful—by a nosegay of fresh herbs that pour out of his upper pocket. A generation ago, Marcella Hazan's Italian cookbooks tried to part a sea of red sauces by fancying things up, but Beppe's cooking is purely Franciscan: all for the barefoot, the countryish, the organic, and the sincerely voiced. The tastes at a Beppe dinner on a summer evening are those of an imaginary Tuscan hillside farm, with high rank given to low starches: his farrotto is different every night, and his Tuscan fries, with fried fresh herbs laid over the quick-sautéed potatoes, should be forced at gunpoint into every McDonald's in America. Even a seemingly simple dish of more beans and sausages—the beans now light and fluffy, the sausages dense and musky and redolent of rosemary and pig—seems definitive.

Is Beppe the best Italian restaurant in New York? Someplace must be, surely . . . but no sooner have you added a laurel on Casella's head to go with the tarragon in his pocket than you recall that the beauty of Italian cooking is that it is the most forgiving and the most soulful cooking we have, and that the element of soul admits of no degrees. (Open weekdays for lunch and dinner and Saturdays for dinner. Entrées $24-$29.)

—Adam Gopnik

Evans (Jonno Roberts), who seems to want to hang out. Scenes of casual surrealism culminate, in the second half of the play, in acts of physical and emotional violence that do more than shock: they arouse both pity and despair. (5/17/04) (Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St., at Seventh Ave. 212-239-6200.)

DRACULA, THE MUSICAL
A new Broadway play inspired by the Bram Stoker story, starring Melissa Errico and Tom Hewitt, has a book and lyrics by Christopher Hampton and Don Black and music by Frank Wildhorn. Directed by Des McAnuff. (Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

FICTION
The estimable playwright Steven Dietz is a post-modernist of sorts. His main characters, the lovers Linda (Julie White) and Michael (Tom Irwin), are both writers. They speak directly to the audience, which means that they talk—and talk and talk—a great deal about writing. Dietz, though, is too canny to leave the narrative to Linda's and Michael's words alone. To lend the play dramatic heft, he gives Linda cancer and Michael a brief dalliance with the organizer of a writers' conference. Blond and opinionated, Abby (Emily Bergl) is just the kind of girl who can drag a writer out of his head and into his body, by way of hers. And while this is all very absorbing to consider—the truth in lies, the deceit in action—the points the play tries to make are only marginally engaging, because they feel like just that: points. Directed by David Warren. (8/23/04) (Roundabout, Laura Pels Theatre, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300. Through Sept. 12.)

FIDDLER ON THE ROOF
In this elegant revival, the star (Alfred Molina), the director (David Leveaux), the costume designer (Vicki Mortimer), and the set designer (Tom Pye) are English; they bring to the production a certain cultural detachment, which imposes a powerful lucidity on the story and allows its moral debate to gather proper poetic momentum. Every well-sculpted second has within it a sense of both regret and release, which makes the comic and tragic elements of the story at once nostalgic, evergreen, and adult. (3/8/04) (Minskoff, 200 W. 45th St. 212-307-4100.)

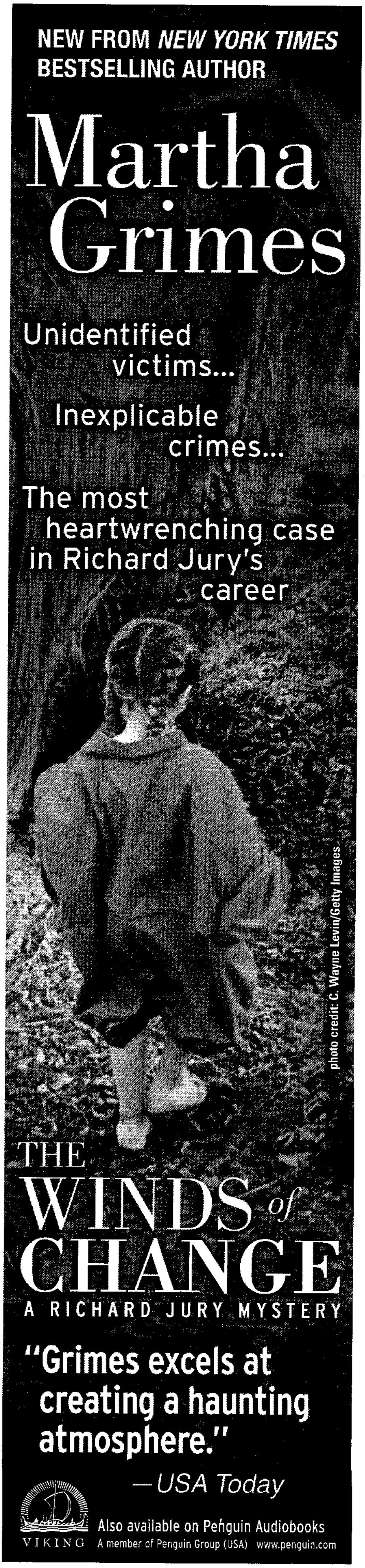
THE FROGS
If you like your Aristophanes delivered with over-produced Burt Bacharach-style slickness, there is much to recommend this show (part of the Lincoln Center Festival, at the Vivian Beaumont). Freely adapted by Burt Shevelove from the 405 B.C. comedy, with music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, the show was originally produced in 1974 at the Yale School of Drama with a cast that included a number of students, among them Meryl Streep, Sigourney Weaver, and Christopher Durang. Here the main event is Nathan Lane, who stars as Dionysos and who has also expanded Shevelove's script from one hour to two and a half. A self-consciously adorable one-man band in a toga, Lane goes out of his way to upstage all the other performers, not to mention the text itself. Suffice it to say that the cloying sentiment at the heart of Lane's windup-puppy style of acting infects everything here, including Susan Stroman's so-so direction and choreography. (8/9 & 16/04) (212-239-6200.)

GUANTÁNAMO: HONOR BOUND TO DEFEND FREEDOM
A drama about post-9/11 detainees in Guantánamo, composed of interviews with prisoners and their families, comes to the Culture Project (home of "The Exonerated") after a long run in London—where it is still playing. Written by Victoria Brittain and Gillian Slovo. Directed by Nicolas Kent with Sacha Wares. (45 Bleecker St. 212-307-4100.)

I LOVE PARIS
You get pretty much what you'd expect in Doug Field's tongue-in-cheek performance as the socialite heiress Paris Hilton—a heaping portion of celebrity dish with no real surprises. Still, it's good dirty fun, and Hilton is played with wide-eyed opacity by Kevin Shinick, who enters the stage in BVDs and a T-shirt. Directed by Timothy Haskell. (Blue Heron Arts Center, 123 E. 24th St. 212-868-4444.)

LET'S PUT ON A SHOW
Mickey Rooney and his eighth wife, Jan Rooney (née Chamberlin, a singer and actress several decades his junior), star in a tribute to their twenty-five years of marriage and to his eighty-two years in show business (he joined his parents' vaudeville act at the age of one). Dressed in black tie (Mickey) and turquoise sequins (Jan), and with complementary voices—his raspy, hers polished—they sing love songs, both old standards ("Our Love Is Here to Stay") and Mickey Rooney originals ("We're Married"), interlarding them with personal anecdotes about Hollywood's golden age. Rooney, a natural raconteur, delivers his stardust memories with the brand of wide-eyed enthusiasm that he more or less invented in M-G-M's Andy Hardy film series, in the nineteen-thirties—the vehicle that made him an international star and threw him in the path of his fellow-legend Judy Garland. Musical direction by Sam Krieger. (Irish Repertory Theatre, 132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737.)

MEDEA IN JERUSALEM
Roger Kirby's update of Euripides' tragedy imagines Medea as a Palestinian Muslim and Jason as an Israeli Jew. Actual recent news reports take the place of a chorus, which works to some degree, but the ones that involve a failed effort to bring peace to Middle Eastern kids through puppets are problematic. The gravitas of the heroine, played by the sinuous dancer and actress Rebecca Wisocky, is not enhanced by the fact that she's simply a betrayed wife, not a betrayed queen. And Kirby's Jason (Sean Haberle) has too much power and not enough kingliness. Still, the set, by Nicolai Hart-Hansen, with lighting by Thom Weaver, is wonderfully evocative, built as it is around two stone doorways that, when the light is right, look like the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Martha Grimes
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Inexplicable crimes...
The most heartwrenching case in Richard Jury's career
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THE WINDS of CHANGE
A RICHARD JURY MYSTERY
"Grimes excels at creating a haunting atmosphere."
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twin tablets of the Ten Commandments. Directed by Steven Little. (Rattlestick, 224 Waverly Pl. 212-868-4444. Through Sept. 4.)

MRS. FARNSWORTH
A. R. Gurney's play about a Connecticut Wasp who had a compromising relationship with the current President returns to the Flea. Directed by Jim Simpson. (41 White St. 212-352-3101. Through Sept. 4.)

PICON PIE
Barbara Minkus, in lovely voice, performs this tour of the life and music of Molly Picon, the star of Yiddish theatre and film who went on to Broadway and Hollywood. Although her offstage life was touched by tragedy—a miscarriage, Alzheimer's disease—Picon is most remembered for her good cheer, which she displayed in the 1937 film "Yiddle Mitn Fiddle," in which she sings, "Yiddle, fiddle, shmiddle, ho! / The world's a happy place!" from the top of a hay cart. Directed by Pamela Hall. (DR2, 103 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200.)

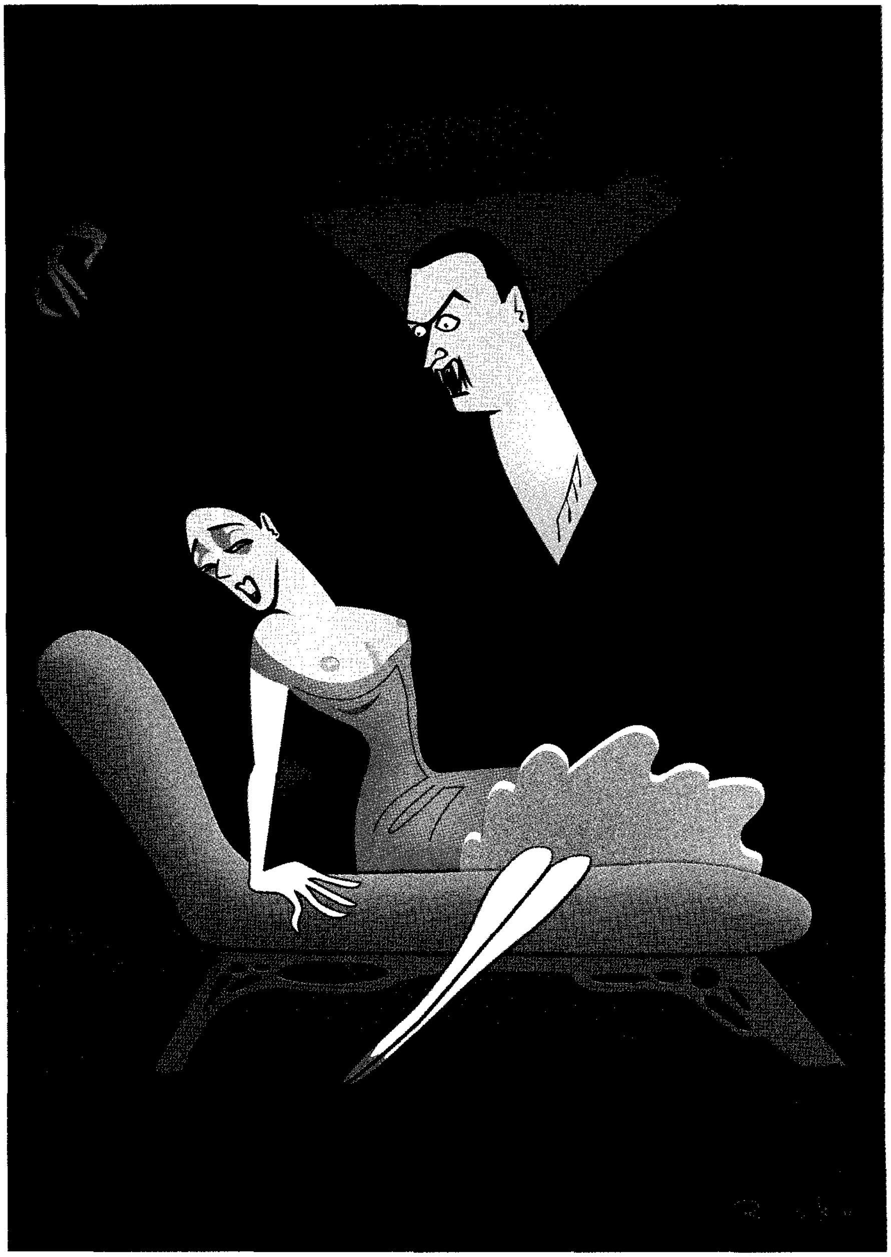
PLUMS IN NEW YORK
In this manic yet charming one-woman romp, the exuberant and limber Anna Rósa Sigurdardóttir plays Gudrún, a solipsistic Icelandic writer living in New York, whose body is inhabited by the spirit of the Swedish author August Strindberg. This communion seizes her from time to time, provoking heavy breathing and a variety of highly sexualized yoga poses. Written by Sigurdardóttir and directed by Hera Ólafsdóttir. With original, live music by Rósa Gudmundsdóttir and a terrific video backdrop by Egill Ingibergsson and Móeidur Helgadóttir. (Clurman, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

TOXIC AUDIO: LOUDMOUTH
In a high-energy production conceived and directed by René Ruiz, who also performs, five human beat boxes use their voices to create percussion accompaniment to pop and jazz songs, and to simulate what sound like guitar and horn solos. At the end of the show, when they sing unmiked, it's like a magician showing he has nothing up his sleeve. With sound design by John A. Valines III and scenery and lighting design by Peter R. Feuchtwanger. (Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

WAITIN' 2 END HELL
William A. Parker's drama about the failing marriage of a black middle-class couple has some sharp, insightful writing in it. It also has stellar performances from its two leads, Marcus Naylor and Trish McCall. Directed by Woodie King, Jr. (47th Street Playhouse, 304 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. Through Sept. 12.)

ALSO PLAYING

AIDA
Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-307-4747. (Closes Sept. 5.)
AVENUE Q
Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.
BEAUTY AND THE BEAST
Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 212-307-4747.
BLUE MAN GROUP
Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 212-254-4370.
CHICAGO
Ambassador, 215 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200.
COOKIN'
Minetta Lane, 18 Minetta Lane, east of Sixth Ave., between W. 3rd and Bleecker Sts. 212-420-8000.
DE LA GUARDA
Daryl Roth, 20 Union Sq. E., at 15th St. 212-239-6200.
FORBIDDEN BROADWAY SUMMER SHOCK!
Douglas Fairbanks, 432 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.
42ND STREET
Ford Center, 213 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4100.
GOLDA'S BALCONY
Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.
HAIRSPRAY
Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 212-307-4100.
HERE LIES JENNY
Zipper Theatre, 336 W. 37th St. 212-239-6200.



Melissa Errico and Tom Hewitt star in "Dracula, the Musical," at the Belasco.

ROBERT RISKO

I AM MY OWN WIFE
Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.
I LOVE YOU, YOU'RE PERFECT, NOW CHANGE
Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 212-239-6200.
THE LION KING
New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4100.
MAMMA MIA!
Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 212-563-5544.
MOVIN' OUT
Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 212-307-4100.
THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA
Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.
THE PRODUCERS
St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.
RENT
Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 212-307-4100.
STOMP
Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at 8th St. 212-477-2477.
WICKED
Gershwin, 222 W. 51st St. 212-307-4100.
WONDERFUL TOWN
Al Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.

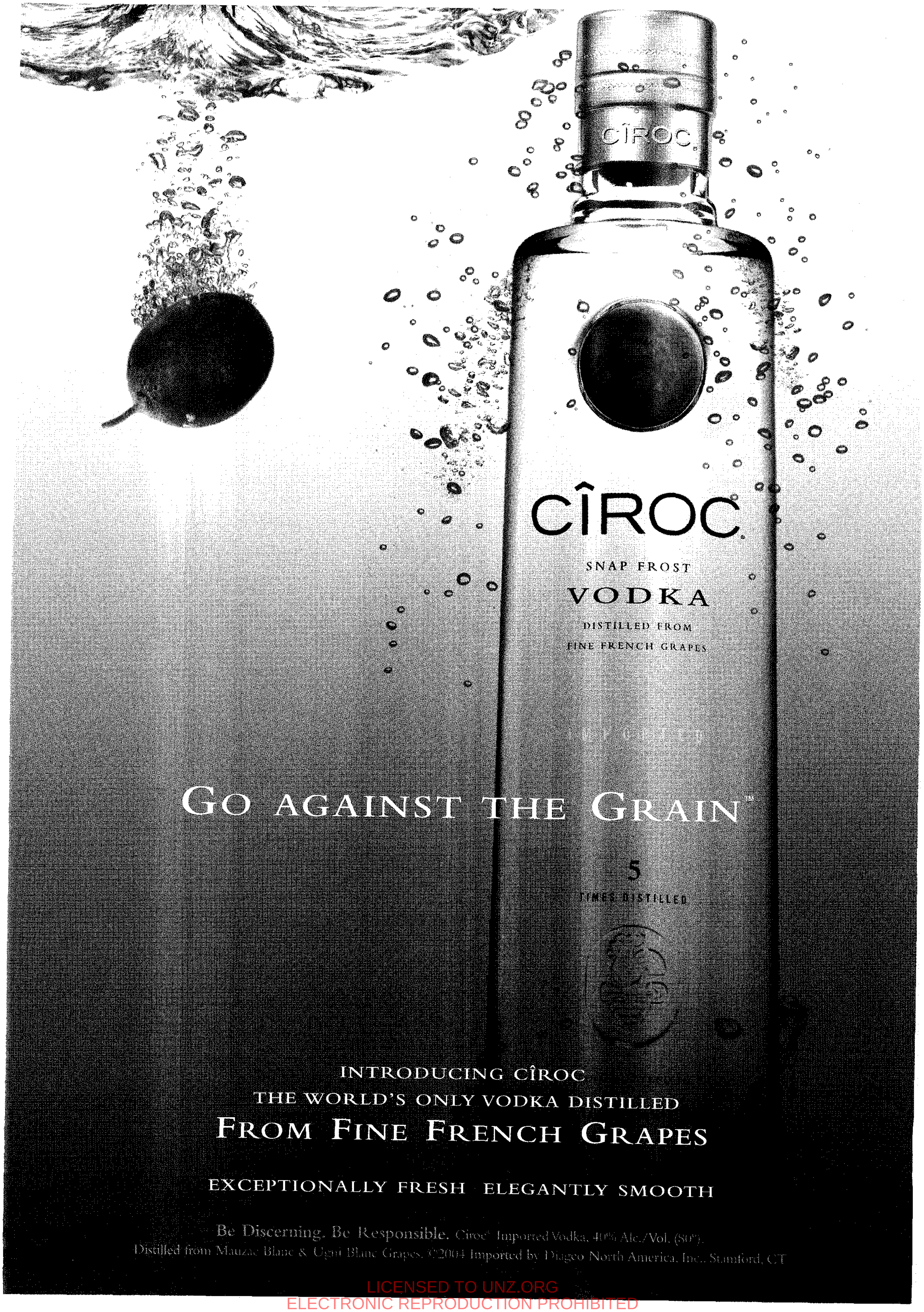
NIGHT LIFE CONCERTS

NORAH JONES
Jones's tender ballads and restrained piano playing have brought millions of adults back into record stores. (Jones Beach Theatre. 212-307-7171. Sept. 3 at 8.)

TOBY KEITH
The country artist, actor, and discount-long-distance pitchman has courted both fortune and infamy with "Courtesy of the Red, White, and Blue (The Angry American)" and other unapologetic odes to Bush-era foreign policy. His latest album, titled "Shock'n Y'All," stays the course. (P.N.C. Bank Arts Center, Holmdel, N.J. 212-307-7171. Sept. 4 at 7:30.)

JIMMY BUFFETT
The man from Margaritaville has his first No. 1 album, "License to Chill," featuring the country sounds of Toby Keith, Martina McBride, Clint Black, Kenny Chesney, and Alan Jackson. (Jones Beach Theatre. Sept. 4 at 8.)

NEW YORK JEWISH MUSIC & HERITAGE FESTIVAL
In 1654, Sephardic refugees from Brazil moved to New Amsterdam, becoming the first Jewish settlers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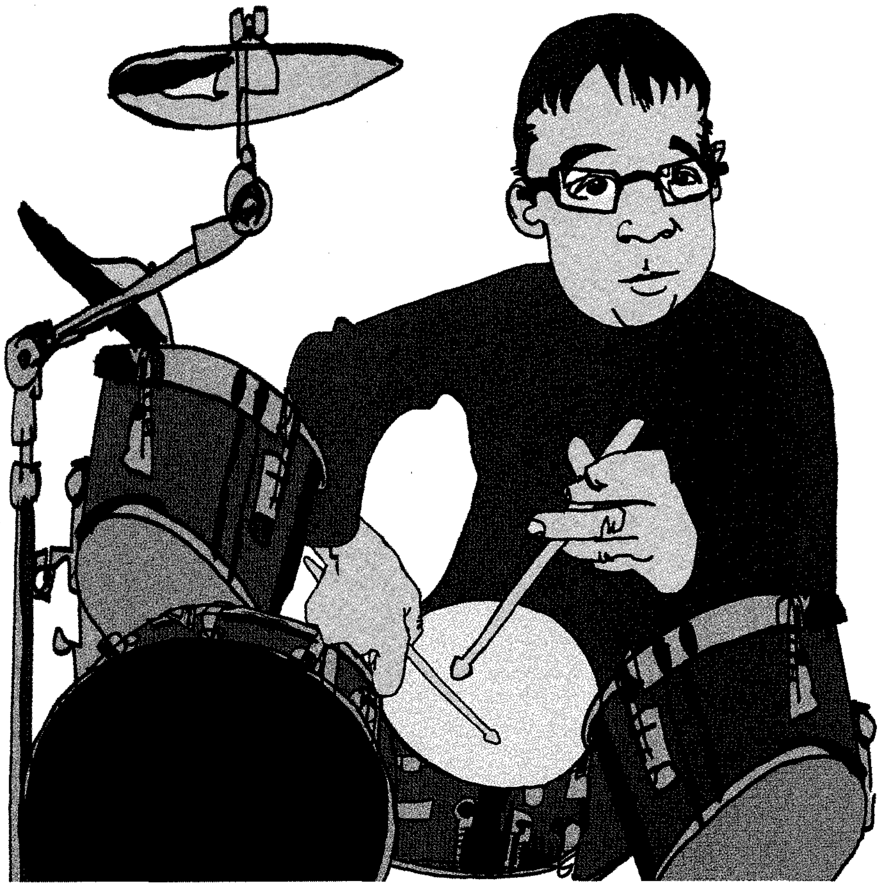
in North America. This weeklong celebration of the three-hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary of their arrival starts with a concert featuring Neil Sedaka, Fred Hersch, Philip Glass, Debbie Friedman, Soulfarm, Lisa Loeb, and Jill Sobule. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. For more information about the festival, which runs through Sept. 14, call 212-608-0555, or visit www.oyhoo.com. Sept. 7 at 8.)

CLUBS

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

BARBÈS
376 9th St., Park Slope, Brooklyn (718-965-9177)—Sept. 4: The roots rock of the **Wiyos.** Sept. 7: **Andy Statman,** a clarinet and mandolin virtuoso, is an American visionary. Although he has immersed himself in Eastern European klezmer music, he's more than willing to incorporate jazz, country, and other New World sounds into the Old World mix. He plays duets here with the bassist **Jim Whitney.**



The percussionist Roberto Rodriguez brings his big band to Tonic on Sept. 6.

JASHAR AWAN

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—Sept. 4: A night for purists of old-school heavy metal, marking the twentieth anniversary of the "Monsters of Rock" festival at Castle Donnington, in the U.K. The show features **McBrain Damage,** a side project of the affable longtime Iron Maiden drummer, Nicko McBrain. The band includes veterans of Great White, Deepset, and Failsafe, and you can expect them to do their hirsute best with such Maiden classics as "The Number of the Beast," "The Trooper," and "Run to the Hills." Sept. 5-6: **Siouxsie Sioux,** a veteran of the early days of British punk rock. As a teen-ager, Susan Janet Dallion saw the Sex Pistols, formed Siouxsie & the Banshees, and pushed punk from three-chord garage rock into more complex, goth-inflected music. After she disbanded the Banshees, in 1995, Siouxsie concentrated on the Creatures, a more percussive project with her husband and drummer, Budgie. These shows promise selections from her entire catalogue.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Sept. 1: **El-P,** a New York-born rapper and the mastermind behind the underground label Definitive Jux, has an intensely bitter intonation and favors rhymes overloaded with syllables. Sharing the bill is **Aesop Rock,** a rapper who strikes an intimate, confessional tone. Sept. 7: **Tackhead.** As the house band for the rap label Sugar Hill, Tackhead contributed to some of early hip-hop's most memorable tunes, including "Rapper's Delight," "The Message," and "White Lines (Don't Do It)." The group then stretched into funk and industrial rock and experimental post-punk. A failed courting of the mainstream in the early nineties broke the band's momentum and they vanished. The original lineup has reconvened for a small tour.

IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—Sept. 7: The downtown aesthetes **Les Savy Fav** specialize in murky, guitar-based rock with angry-young-man leanings. ♦ The New York Swing Dance Society gathers here the first Sunday of every month, with lessons at 7 and live music from 8:15 until midnight. The **Harlem Renaissance Orchestra** does the honors on Sept. 5. For information on the Society, call 212-696-9737.

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—Sept. 2: The "born again" singer **Tammy Faye Starlite.** Sept. 4: The **Fabulous Entourage** is a local quintet of youthful punk-popsters hell-bent on bringing theatrics back to rock and roll. They favor needlessly elaborate staging and frequent costume changes. With the even more youthful **Li'l Gn'R,** an all-child Guns N' Roses tribute band.

KNITTING FACTORY
74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (212-219-3055)—Sept. 3-5: Despite the claims of a recent *Times* article about the decline of goth fashion, the subculture endures. The evidence: the **Drop Dead Festival,** a three-day celebration of black clothing, black hair, and black humor that brings together such artists as Skeletal Family, Ausgang, Cinema Strange, the Secret Cervix, Cult of the Psychic Fetus, and Malice in Leatherland (to name but a few). Expect all stripes of death rock, psychobilly, and horror punk.

MERCURY LOUNGE
217 E. Houston St. (212-260-4700)—Sept. 2: The **Mendoza Line,** a literate sextet from Brooklyn by way of Athens, Georgia, turns out sweet countryesque music. Sept. 3: **Two Dollar Pistols,** a country-revival band from North Carolina led by the drummer turned guitarist John Howie, Jr. Their latest album, "Hands Up!," is packed with twang-filled songs of regret, heartbreak, and drinking.

SATALLA
37 W. 26th St. (212-576-1155)—Sept. 3: **Bio Ritmo,** a salsa band from Richmond, Virginia.

WEBSTER HALL
125 E. 11th St. (212-353-1600)—Sept. 1: **Liz Phair,** the onetime belle of the indie underground, went mainstream last year with her self-titled fourth album (helped by the hit-making producers the Matrix). With the **Cardigans, Katy Rose,** and **Charlotte Martin.**

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ALGONQUIN HOTEL
59 W. 44th St. (212-840-6800)—Starting Sept. 7: **Stacey Kent** (see This Week).

BARBÈS
376 9th St., Park Slope, Brooklyn (718-965-9177)—Sept. 2: Expect the unexpected with the **Refuge Trio,** featuring the vocalist **Theo Bleckmann,** the drummer **John Hollenbeck,** and the keyboardist **Gary Versace.** Bleckmann and Hollenbeck have enough new-music, cabaret, and jazz chops to move the music in any direction they want, while Versace has lately been making big noise on his Hammond organ. Sept. 3: The **4th St. Niteowls,** a washboard swing group from Hoboken, favor the works of Fats Waller, Louis Armstrong, and Hoagy Carmichael. Sundays: The French guitarist **Stephane Wrembel** runs his trio through the songs of Django Reinhardt, Charles Mingus, Duke Ellington, and others.

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—Sept. 1-2: After Kenny Kirkland died, in 1989, the imaginative modernist **Joey Calderazzo** replaced him in Branford Marsalis's quartet and made the spot his own. Calderazzo's new album, "Haiku," is a solo piano work, but he will front a trio here. Sept. 3-4: **Lynne Arriale's** trio should be better known. The able pianist balances lyricism with relentless swing and has an airtight bond with her longtime associates, the bassist **Jay Anderson** and the drummer **Steve Davis.** Sundays: **Chico O'Farrill's Afro-Cuban Jazz Big Band.** One of the most welcome comebacks of the late nineties was the unexpected reëmergence of the arranger, composer, and bandleader O'Farrill, a grand architect of Afro-Cuban jazz. His steaming Latin rhythms and stinging bop horn lines feel as vital now as when they were goosing the likes of Charlie Parker, Flip Philips, and Dizzy Gillespie. Sadly, Chico died three years ago, but his son Arturo keeps the flame (and the band) burning.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Sept. 2-5: **Abbey Lincoln,** the grande dame of jazz singers and an inspiration for divas-in-training, gives new life to standards and imbues her own songs with a gusto drawn from lessons about life learned the hard way.

CHARLIE O'S TIMES SQUARE
1611 Broadway, at 49th St. (212-246-1960)—After some four years at the Cajun, a restaurant in Chelsea, **Vince Giordano** and his **Nighthawks Orchestra** have moved uptown. Wielding the most unwieldy of instruments (bass, tuba, bass saxophone) as

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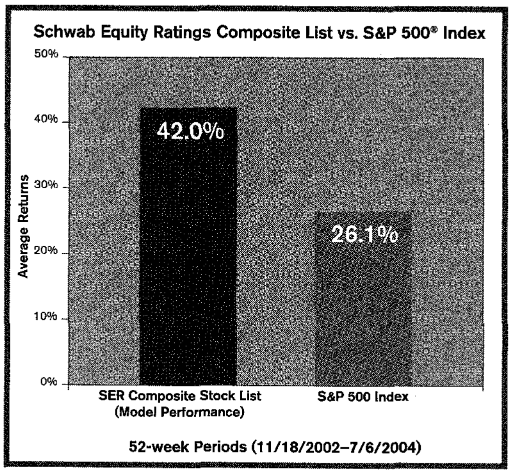

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Queen Mary 2

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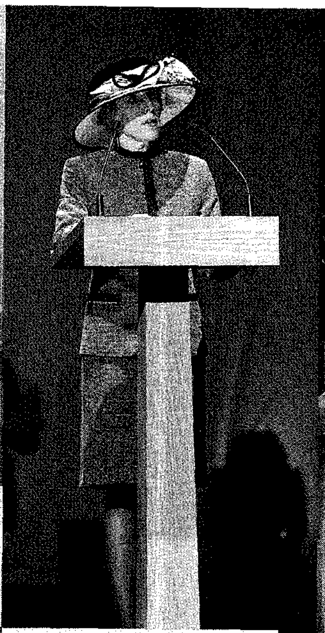
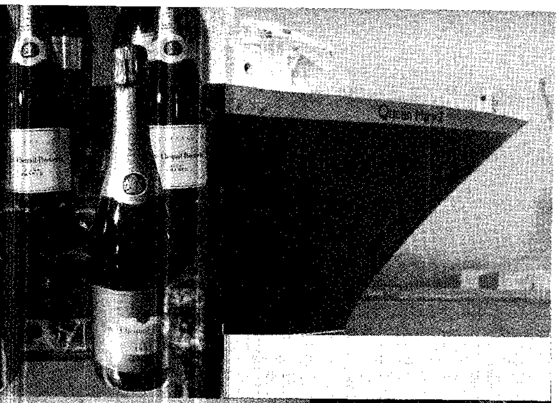
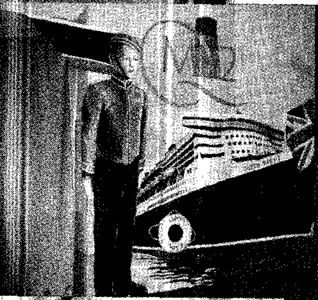
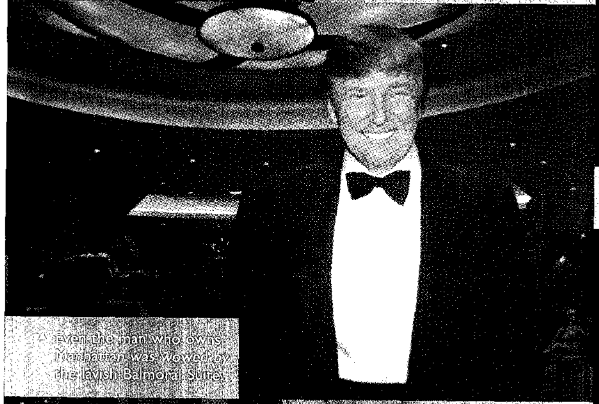


President Pam Conover [illegible] Cunard's 160-year history [illegible]



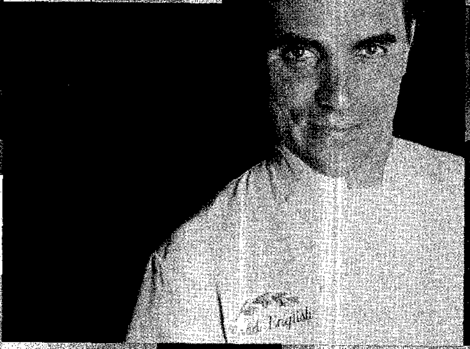


▲ Hats were all the rage at the Naming Ceremony in Southampton, January 8, 2



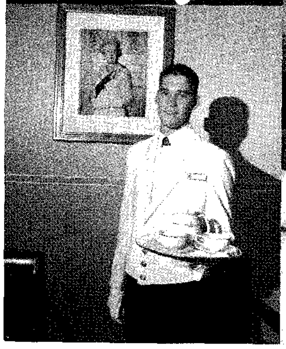
▲ Even the man who owns Manhattan was wowed by the lavish Balmoral Suite.

▼ Take Manhattan, Just let us keep Todd English.



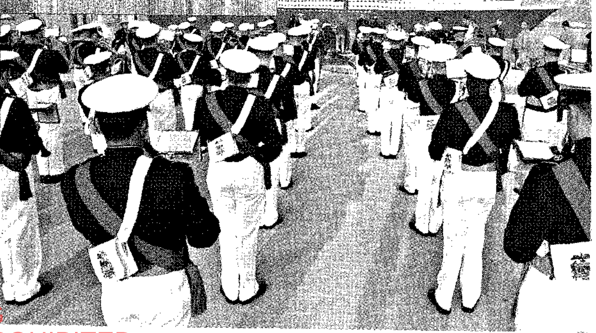
▼ Travelling as [illegible] Churchill [illegible] the Atlantic [illegible] the Queen [illegible]

▼ Veuve Clicquot, the champagne of [illegible] Royalty, is [illegible] home on QM2.



▼ Anyone for tea? The Boston Cup takes its place on Cunard's flagship.

▼ The U.S. Merchant Marine Academy Band of Kings Point, NY. Each port rolls out its own version of the red carpet treatment.



[illegible] ordinary, the people you meet [illegible] miles south of Newfoundland.

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well as a bulbous vintage Kellogg microphone, Giordano leads a tuxedo-clad eleven-piece band whose ease with early jazz and swing breathes life into an overlooked era. They're here on Mondays and Tuesdays.

DANNY'S
346 W. 46th St. (212-265-8133)—Fifty years ago, no one sounded like **Blossom Dearie,** and today she's still the only one. Her wispy vocal instrument nails the sly lyrics of David Frishberg's "I'm Hip" and "My Attorney Bernie" and coaxes the bittersweet tinge out of "Bye Bye Country Boy." She's here on Saturdays and Sundays.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Through Sept. 5: **Jimmy Scott.** You can hear all seventy-nine of his years in his well-worn voice, but that only adds poignancy to his way with a ballad. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.**

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Aug. 31-Sept. 5: **Bill Charlap,** a mainstream pianist of exceptional grace and style, holds court. He's joined by the tenor saxophonist **Houston Person** on opening night. Sept. 1: The trumpeter **Warren Vache** sits in. Sept. 2: Charlap is joined by the drummer **Bill Stewart** and the bassist **Jay Leonhart.** Sept. 3: Charlap's guest is the bassist **Ray Drummond.** Sept. 4: **Ben Wolfe,** on bass, and **Eddie Locke,** on drums. Sept. 5: Charlap performs solo.

METROPOLITAN CAFÉ
959 First Ave., at 53rd St. (212-759-5600)—The drummer **Chris Parker's** band **Toph-e and the Pussycats,** which includes the bassist **Will Lee,** the percussionist **Ralph McDonald,** the keyboardist **Clifford Carter,** and the saxophonist **David Mann,** jams on favorites by the likes of Duke Ellington, Ivan Lins, Don Grolnick, and their old friend the late keyboardist Richard Tee. They're here the next three Tuesdays, starting Sept. 7.

SMOKE
2751 Broadway, between 105th and 106th Sts. (212-864-6662)—Sept. 3-4: The pianist **Mike LeDonne** is a fleet bebop player who has held down the keyboard spot for such patriarchs as James Moody and the late Milt Jackson. He's also a wizard on the Hammond B3 organ, his instrument of choice here.

SWEET RHYTHM
88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (212-255-3626)—The drummer **Rashied Ali** gave John Coltrane a run for his money during the last two years of the saxophone giant's career. Over the following three-plus decades Ali has never curbed his intensity. He leads his own quintet on Sept. 3-4.

TONIC
107 Norfolk St. (212-358-7503)—Sept. 2-3: The drummer **Bobby Previte** and the guitarist **Charlie Hunter** are a pair of sonic adventurers who call themselves **Groundtruther** when they convene their occasional duo. The equally visionary trumpeter **Steve Bernstein** joins them as a special guest. Sept. 5: **John Zorn's Masada String Trio,** featuring the violinist **Mark Feldman,** the cellist **Erik Friedlander,** and the bassist **Greg Cohen,** unites new-jazz vitality with Old World flavor and extracts pathos and passion from the leader's repertoire of original Jewish themes. Sept. 6: **Roberto Rodriguez,** a percussionist for Joe Jackson and the only Cuban in Marc Ribot's band Los Cubanos Postizos, leads his own big band, delving into Cuban jazz and Jewish music without ever losing the dance beat.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Through Sept. 5: The drummer **Paul Motian,** the guitarist **Bill Frisell,** and the saxophonist **Joe Lovano** have celebrated solo careers, but when they unite they're a marvel of group empathy. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ZINC BAR
90 W. Houston St. (212-477-8337)—Mondays: **Ron Affif,** a mainstream guitarist whose technical command and singing tone beg for wider recognition. Saturdays and Sundays feature Brazilian music.

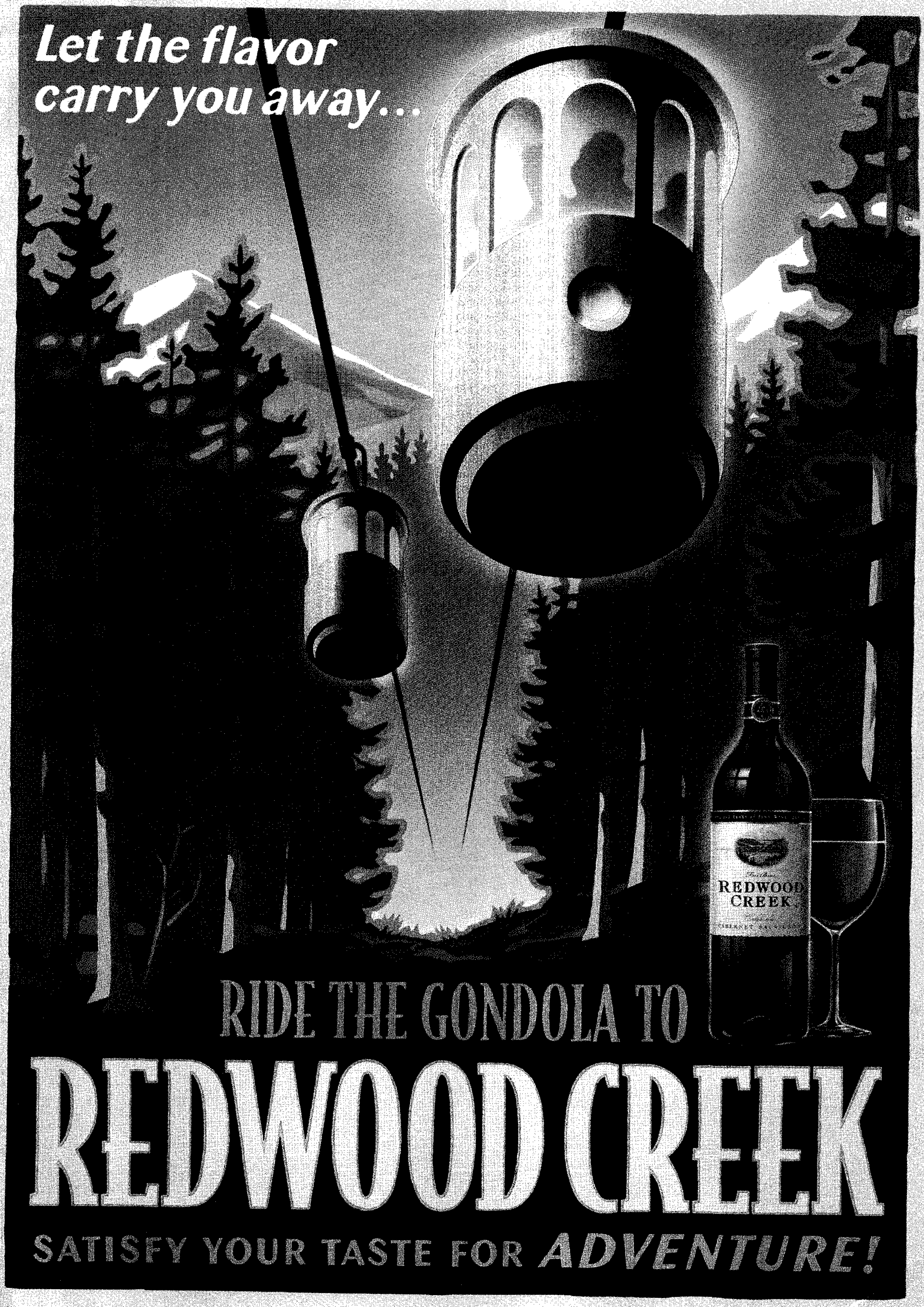
"A View from Brooklyn I (1953)," by Rudy Burkhardt, at de Nagy (see Photography).

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-879-5500)—The sylphs, stylized flowers, and sumptuous geometries of **"Art Deco Paris"** are familiar, but what's interesting about this show—a pendant to the concurrent gathering of works by the master designer Jacques-Émile Ruhlmann—is the fetishistic love of lavish materials and their juxtapositions. There's a side table in ebony, ivory, and green-dyed sharkskin; a tea-and-coffee service in silver trimmed with lapis lazuli; a dressing table made of bronze and basalt. Also included are artifacts from the celebrated interior-decorating firm of Süe et Mare, which employed starving artists like Raoul Dufy, Marie Laurencin, and Fernand Léger. Through Feb. 27. ♦ **"Ruhlmann: Genius of Art Deco."** Through Sept. 5. ♦ **"August Sander: People of the Twentieth Century, a Photographic Portrait of Germany"** gathers a hundred and fifty photographs from Sander's catalogue of Germans—including "Composer," "Pastrycook," "Member of Hitler Youth," "Peddler," "Match Seller," and "Gypsy"—taken between 1911 and 1952. Sander worked through the war years, but his project was not a favorite of the Nazis, who impounded a book of the photographs in 1936 and destroyed the plates. Under the category "Political Prisoners," there's a portrait of the photographer's son Erich in a cell, and under "The Last People," a photograph of Erich's death mask. The project inspired Steichen's "Family of Man" as well as chillier Becher and Struth prints shown in an adjacent gallery. Through Sept. 19. ♦ **"Dangerous Liaisons: Fashion and Furniture in the Eighteenth Century."** Through Sept. 6. ♦ **"Childe Hassam, American Impressionist."** Through Sept. 12. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART (MOMA QNS)
33rd St. at Queens Blvd., Long Island City (212-708-9400)—**"Tall Buildings"** documents twenty-five recent skyscraper designs with photographs, models, diagrams, and blueprints. The buildings veer from the rustic-modern Arcos Bosques, in Mexico City, to the sleek Électricité de France, in Paris, from the sculptural Frank Gehry proposal for the *Times* headquarters to Santiago Calatrava's wacky "Turning Torso" in Malmö, Sweden. All—including several World Trade Center designs—are ripostes to post-9/11 decrees against building too forcefully skyward. Rem Koolhaas naturally wins the prize for zaniest mockup with a tree-bark model for Togok (XL Towers), in Seoul, but Arata Isozaki's gorgeous wood model for the JR Ueno Railway Station, in Tokyo, rivals sculptures in the museum's permanent collection. Through Sept. 27. ♦ A sculptor who went AWOL from the gallery scene more than thirty years ago makes her triumphant return with **"Lee Bontecou: A Retrospective."** In the heyday of minimalism, Bontecou produced complex, Orwellian-looking sculptures out of everything from the drab canvas used on conveyor belts to sparkplugs, saws, and pipe fittings. Her drawings are simultaneously anachronistic—like Baron von Münchausen fantasies or a Leonardo war machine—and futuristic, calling to mind the slithering forms of anime. Later porcelain sculptures arranged as horizontal tableaux recall Giacometti's Surrealist period and the apocalyptic dreamscapes of Matta and Yves Tanguy. A younger artist would undoubtedly contextualize these objects with lengthy texts, but Bontecou, unsettlingly, leaves everything untitled. Through Sept. 27. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, 10 to 5, and Friday evenings until 7:45.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"Constantin Brancusi: The Essence of Things"** features a silly title, too many weakly sentimental works, and a woeful lobby installation. But it's great. The room of four "Bird" sculptures unfolds a staggering range of stylistic genius, from mythic poetry to Jazz Age elegance. Certain pieces are epiphanic. The all-pedestal "Caryatid" (1914 and 1926) remains radical for its union of art and furniture, and "Mlle. Pogany II" (1919) is a surprising, sublime sculpture from a dozen or so viewpoints. The Guggenheim's ramp energizes this show, as a too rever-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ential mounting of it at the Tate Modern did not. Through Sept. 19. ♦ **"Mondrian to Ryman: The Abstract Impulse."** Through Sept. 19. ♦ **"Speaking with Hands: Photographs from the Buhl Collection."** Through Sept. 8. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3676)—**"Cotton Puffs, Q-Tips, Smoke and Mirrors: The Drawings of Ed Ruscha"** and **"Ed Ruscha and Photography"** are exhilarating shows. The first tracks the forty-five-year course—"development" does not apply to a talent that hit the ground running—of Ruscha's graphic adventures with words, signs, and strange materials (gunpowder, lettuce juice). The second combines rarely seen photographs, notably a prescient group of forty-four from a sojourn in Europe in 1961, with others that relate to the artist's influential books, which are on hand to be thumbed through. Once identified with Los Angeles, Ruscha's suave sorcery is now as global as air. Through Sept. 26. ♦ **"Ana Mendieta: Earth Body Sculpture and Performance 1972-1985."** Through Sept. 19. ♦ **"Memorials of War."** Through Nov. 28. ♦ **"Evidence of Impact: Art and Photography 1963-1978."** Through Oct. 10. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"Frogs: A Chorus of Colors"** presents some two hundred frogs in glass-walled habitats. Stars include the saucer-size African bullfrogs, who have been wrangling with the frog keepers for control of the tongs that are used to feed them frozen mice, and the Chinese gliding frogs, whose toe webbing spreads wide enough to allow them to hang-glide. The centerpiece of the show is a large vivarium filled with seventy-five dart-poison frogs; cameras inside the glass walls can be swivelled, zoomed, and focussed with a pair of joysticks to get a closer look at the jewel-bright hoppers. Through Jan. 9. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

Video by Dave McKenzie in "Figuratively," at the Studio Museum in Harlem.

JOHN HENDRIX

AMERICAN FOLK ART MUSEUM

45 W. 53rd St. (212-265-1040)—**"Masterpieces of American Jewelry"** includes everything from sweet enamelled pansy pins mass-produced in Newark in the nineteen-thirties to galumphing masses of emeralds and diamonds favored by movie stars and socialites. Much of the work celebrates American pastimes or commemorates historical moments: a slender pocket watch (1910) shows Wilbur Wright flying by the Statue of Liberty with a low-lying Manhattan skyline in the background; an 1812 watercolor-on-ivory pin depicts a platoon of soldiers drilling. Other pieces are meant purely to impress, like the exquisite orchid brooches that Tiffany & Co. made for the 1889 World's Fair, in Paris; they would be perfectly lifelike but for the diamonds edging their enamelled petals. Through Jan. 23. ♦ One of the visionary poem-drawings in **"Tools of Her Ministry: The Art of Sister Gertrude Morgan"** bears the title "Alpha Be Poem Rote by Me the Lord's Wife Prophetess Morgan Missionary." What seems semiliterate is in fact a compressed linguistic package, loaded with puns equating reading and writing with God and religious ecstasy. Such allusive elegance rather outdoes most of the other drawings, which tend to be populated by ghostly white angels with long crimson hair. But Sister Gertrude—who ran the Everlasting Gospel Mission in New Orleans for some fifteen years—is nothing if not engaging. Through Oct. 10. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 7:30.)

COOPER-HEWITT NATIONAL DESIGN MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 91st St. (212-849-8300)—Kurt Andersen, the curator of **"Faster, Cheaper, Newer, More: Revolutions of 1848,"** demonstrates persuasively that the thing we call modernity was born smack in the middle of the nineteenth century. Consider, for instance, the Jenny Lind paper dolls commemorating the first global pop star, or the goblets that were among the earliest mass-produced glassware. A pair of eighteen-fifties cufflinks made of aluminum, which was then a novelty, were more expensive than a pair in gold. Through Jan. 28. ♦ In the museum garden, **"FutureShack,"** an industrial shipping container conceived by the Australian architect Sean Godsell as refugee-camp housing, is outfitted with solar power and a bathroom, combining Samuel Mockbee's socially conscious building projects with haute-minimalist design. Through Oct. 10. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10 to 5; Fridays, 10 to 9; Saturdays, 10 to 6; and Sundays, noon to 6.)

JEWISH MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—It's all about the face: the sloping nose, the close-set almond eyes, the tight button mouth. Throw in a swanlike neck and impossible, sloping shoulders and you've got a Modigliani. **"Modigliani: Beyond the Myth"** presents portraits of Montparnasse denizens like Jean Cocteau and Picasso, along with reclining nudes, the brief "Caryatid" series of paintings, and sculptures. Depending on your taste for his archetypal figures, the cumulative effect of this retrospective can be either mesmerizing or a bit wearisome. Through Sept. 19. (Open Mondays through Wednesdays, 11 to 5:45; Thursdays, 11 to 8; Fridays, 11 to 3; and, for the duration of the Modigliani show, Sundays, 10 to 9. The museum will be open until 9 on Labor Day.)

MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Fifth Ave. at 104th St. (212-534-1672)—Most of the work in **"Picturing New York: The Paintings of Peter Ruta"** was created in the artist's studio in the Westbeth Building, looking south toward the harbor or west toward the Gansevoort Street Pier. Occasionally he gazes north, painting the Empire State Building and its environs or a Central Park vista. The artist has been painting in New York for sixty years, and the city in his hands becomes a pared-down geometric abstraction, although, like Titian or Rembrandt in their golden years, Ruta has become more painterly with age. The sharp lines and structures of his cityscapes from the seventies have given way to softer, looser renderings that show Manhattan bathed in a sunset glow. Through Oct. 11. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

MUSEUM OF SEX

233 Fifth Ave., at 27th St. (212-689-6337)—Curatorial alternatives spring to mind early and often as one wanders through **"Get Off! Exploring the Pleasure Principle."** The latex folds in Mabi Revuelta's "Burbujas" recall Cathy de Monchaux's more evocative sculptures in leather, while Michael Schmelling and Matthew Salacuse's "Girl Show Guy Show" photographs make one actually long for the overexposed Nan Goldin. But Karim Rashid's prototype for interactive sex furniture, "Karimsutra," seems perfectly suited to both the show's title and the throbbing dance music playing in the lobby. A small gathering of documentary material offers historical perspective on sexual titillation in art: Vito Acconci's masturbatory performance "Seedbed"; a screening announcement for Jack Smith's "Flaming Creatures"; and Lynda Benglis's famous 1974 project/ad in *Artforum*, in which she depicted herself as a potent sexual hybrid. Through Oct. 3. (Open Sundays through Fridays, 11 to 6:30, and Saturdays, 11 to 8. Museumgoers must be at least eighteen years old.)

NEUE GALERIE

1048 Fifth Ave., at 86th St. (212-628-6200)—**"New Worlds: German and Austrian Art, 1890-1940,"** the exhibition that inaugurated the Neue Galerie in 2001, is back on view. It's still an embarrassment of modernist riches, with paintings and drawings by Klimt, Schiele, Kokoschka, Grosz, and Dix; Kurt Schwitters' "Merz" assemblages; Max Beckmann's "Self-Portrait with Horn" (1938); and vitrines filled with exquisite design objects. Now, however, the exhibition includes an early, pre-abstract Kandinsky painting of a street in Murnau, Kirchner's Expressionist "Franzi with Bow and Arrow," a mixed-media Paul Klee, and Felix Nussbaum's stark, disturbing "Self-Portrait in the Camp" (1940). There's also a greater representation of women, from Bauhaus collagists like Lilly Reich and Marianne Brandt to the Fauve-inspired painter Gabriele Münter. Through Sept. 13. (Open Fridays, 11 to 9, and Saturdays through Mondays, 11 to 6.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER

22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—**Walead Beshty's** photographs of "dead malls," with dry fountains, empty atria, and metal grilles shuttering defunct small businesses, are touching. Funnier and more disturbing is a series of photographs showing Beshty inserting his head into various displays of consumer goods: piles of fake flowers, stuffed animals, a new washing machine, a shiny toilet seat hung up among a hundred others. Through Sept. 19. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

SOUTH STREET SEAPORT MUSEUM

12 Fulton St., at Water St. (212-748-8600)—This institution's exhibitions now stretch over nine

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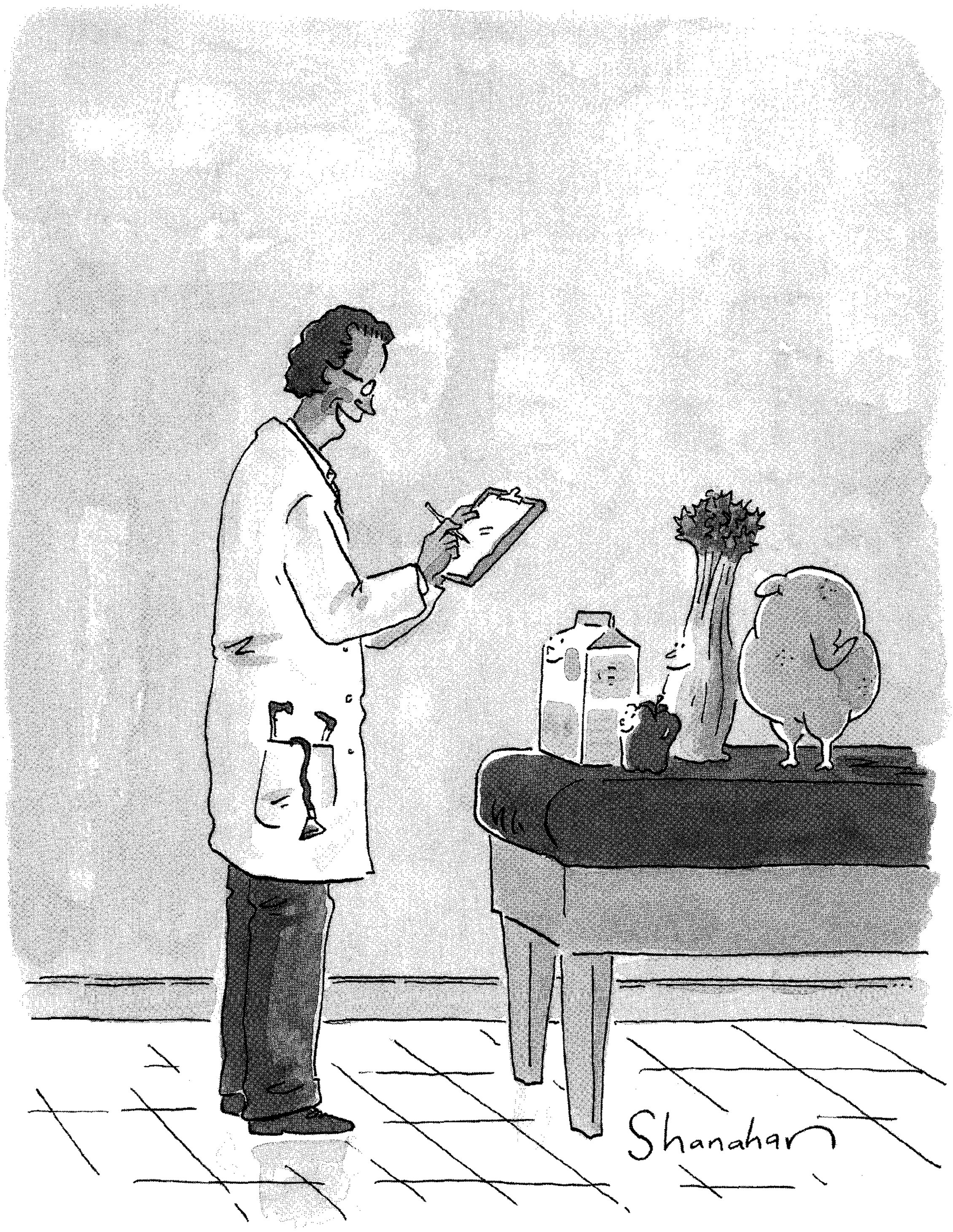

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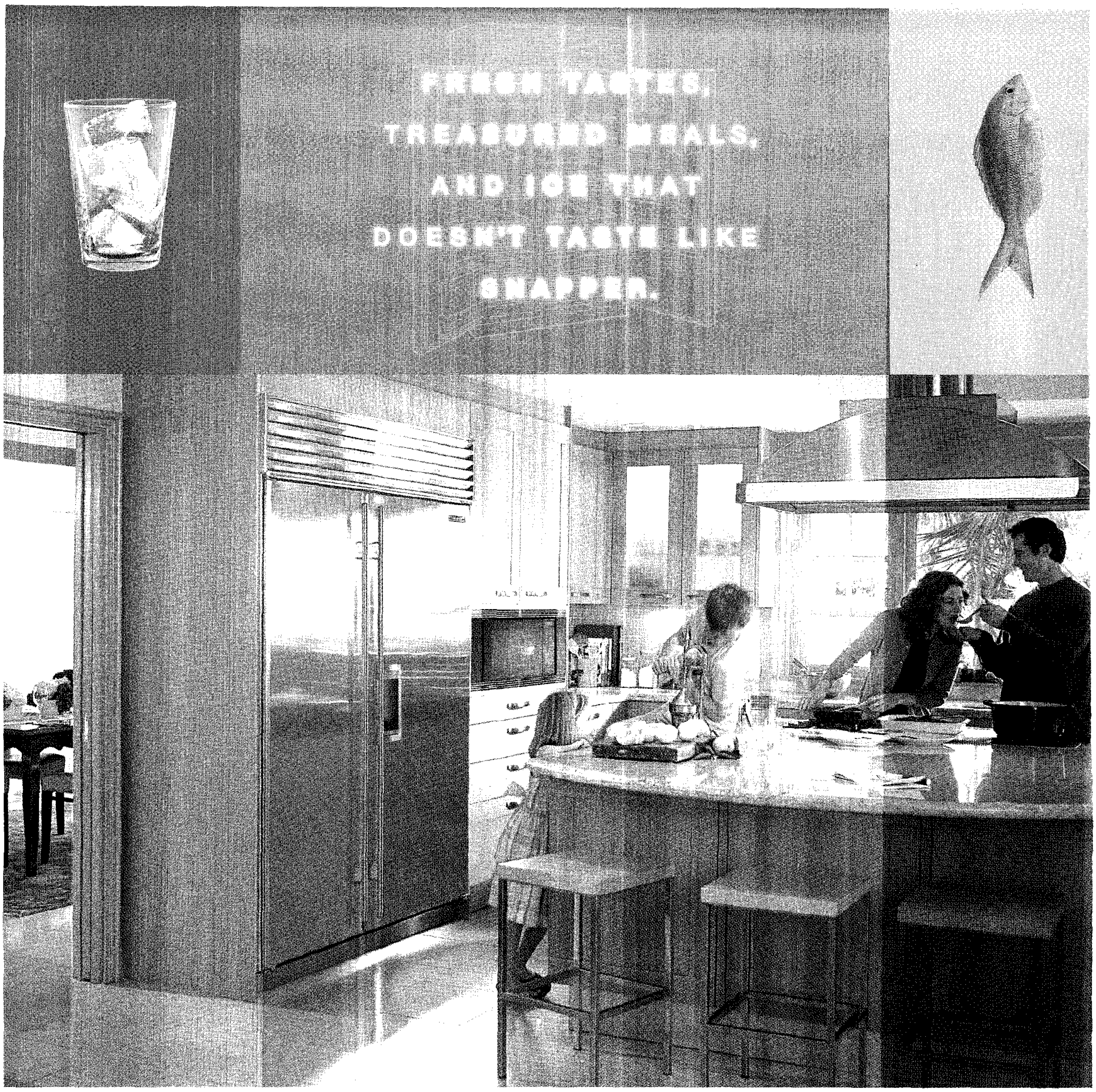
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ships, four storefronts, and a twisty warren of galleries above a new reception space. The show at the latest gallery to open along the Schermerhorn Row labyrinth is **"Nieuw Amsterdam: Dutch New York as Represented in the Archaeological Collections of South Street Seaport Museum."** It includes revealing relics of china and metal, raised from sites like the seventeenth-century Haie/Van Tienhoven privies, outhouses of the city's Dutch settlers—the domestic landfills of another age. Another new exhibit, **"Soundings: Treasures of the Collections of South Street Seaport Museum,"** gathers scrimshaw carvings of technological marvels—the Atlantic Telegraph Station, for instance—model ships built from chicken bones, and the detritus of city businesses, including "A New System of Mercantile Arithmetic: Adapted to the United States and Its Domestic and Foreign Relations with Forms of Accounts and Other Writings Usually Occurring in Trade," the Windows XP of its day. (Open daily, 10 to 5.)

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM

144 W. 125th St. (212-864-4500)—**"Figuratively,"** a showcase of the museum's three artists-in-residence for 2003-04, focusses on active bodies, though abstraction and metaphor are addressed as well. Dave McKenzie presents video and sculpture, including the wistfully satirical "We Shall Overcome," in which Louis Armstrong's rendition of the anthem backs footage of the artist wearing a rubber Bill Clinton mask and glad-handing on 125th Street. William Villalongo's paintings on velvet and silhouettes made of cut velour paper depict strange pairings like Ovidian nymphs and Michael Jackson, while Wangechi Mutu's painted collages present sinuous female forms writhing under suggestive titles like "Magnificent Monkey-Ass Lies." Through Sept. 25. ♦ **"Seeds and Roots: Selections from the Permanent Collection."** Through Sept. 25. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, and Sundays, noon to 6; Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

GALLERIES-UPTOWN

Summer-hours warning: many galleries are open Mondays through Fridays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6. Others follow the normal Tuesday-to-Saturday schedule. It's best to call ahead.

JANET CARDIFF

About fifteen minutes into Cardiff's new work, a narrated walk through Central Park, her sleepy voice intones: "'It is the accidental and insignificant things in life which are significant.' Kierkegaard wrote that. He was a walker." The familiar experience of the Park is illuminated by scraps of Baudelaire, an encounter with a man on a bench whose mother left her family for New York, snippets of Gluck's "Orfeo ed Euridyce." Cardiff occasionally asks you to look at one of the photographs she's tucked in with your CD player; three of them (which she says were found at a garage sale) show an unknown woman standing in the Park years ago and give the piece its title, "Her Long Black Hair." The fifty-minute walk ends in a quiet patch of woods by Bethesda Fountain. Then you walk your equipment back to Fifty-ninth Street. Through Sept. 13. (Starts at the kiosk on Central Park South at Sixth Avenue; a credit card or photo I.D. is required to take out the audio equipment. Thursdays through Mondays, 9:30 to 5. For more information, call the Public Art Fund at 212-446-9529.)

EVA EISLER

The Prague expatriate creates industrial-chic steel jewelry that's favored by architects like Zaha Hadid. She works in series, playing with mechanical concepts, tension, and springs. The pieces, mostly thin strips of twisted steel arranged on panels in sets of four, seem too sharp and uncomfortable for real people to wear—they look something like the gynecological implements from "Dead Ringers." But two larger works in the lobby, knotted Möbius strips presented as sculptures, offer more playful possibilities. They pose as corporate-plaza art but have the springy charm of Slinkys. Through Sept. 10. (Czech Center, 1109 Madison Ave., at 83rd St. 212-288-0830.)

"THE BODY PROJECT"

Tony Scherman provides the R-rated material in this obliging show (art needs the body the way film needs murder), but the in-flagrante blonde of his "Making Babies" has an academic quality: Is she supposed to look so much like Ilona Staller, Jeff Koons's erstwhile wife and model? A lesser Matisse sketch, with multiple outlines showing both the changing mood of the sitter and the artist's small refinements, captures the naked woman's stiff discomfort. Eric Fischl presents a muddy bronze sculpture of a woman squatting. The ambivalent gesture (startled? hygienic? autoerotic?) reminds us of his capacity to disturb. Through Sept. 25. (Winston Wächter, 39 E. 78th St. 212-327-2526.)

Short List

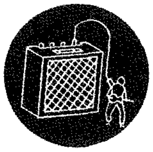
"AFRICAN ART IS . . ."

U.B.S. Art Gallery, 1285 Sixth Ave., at 51st St. 212-713-2885. Through Sept. 10.

"BACK TO PAINT"

C & M, 45 E. 78th St.
212-861-0020.Through Sept. 11.

POP NOTES



SUMMER IN THE COUNTRY

Tift Merritt came off as a striking if conventional alt-country talent on her début album, "Bramble Rose," a few years back. She was a beautiful singer and solid songwriter who had a way with both melodies and metaphors. This time out, with **"Tambourine"** (Lost Highway), Merritt's trying for something different. George Drakoulias, the producer responsible for the success of the Black Crowes, is at the helm, and that guarantees a heavy dose of rowdy Southern rock. "Stray Paper," the opening song, is vaguely reminiscent of Sheryl Crow, but for most of the album, Merritt's melodies and arrangements seem to descend directly from Maria McKee, the former Lone Justice front woman and also a client of Drakoulias. On the 1993 album "You Gotta Sin to Get Saved," McKee attempted an ambitious fusion of soul, country, and gospel, punching across horn-driven R. & B. songs and covering Van Morrison's "The Way Young Lovers Do." This album sounds like a sequel. "Your Love Made a U-Turn" is a soul single, plain and simple. "I Am Your Tambourine" is the most overtly sexy song Merritt has ever recorded. "Shadow in the Way," with its churchy piano, shimmering bands of guitar, and ever-upward backing choir, could be an outtake from a slightly more introspective, slightly more polite version of "Exile on Main Street." McKee herself contributes backing vocals to several tracks. To her credit, Merritt now has an excellent Southern-rock record under her belt; to her discredit, she now has a split personality. Fans await her third record.

The more some artists change, the more other artists stay the same. For five albums now, Junior Brown has used his almost comically deep voice and his dazzling skills on the steel guitar to build one of the most charming bodies of work in country music. On **"Down Home Chrome"** (Telarc), he delivers the usual affectionate sexism ("Little Rivi-Airhead"), goofy sense of humor ("Two Rons Don't Make It Right"), impossibly fleet fretwork (see songs one through twelve), and even a wild cover of Jimi Hendrix's "Foxy Lady," complete with inspired Jimi-like vocals.

—*Ben Greenman*

GALLERIES-CHELSEA

"A.C."

Robert Fontenot's embroidered samplers range from "Frostbite" to "Swelter" to "Conflagration." Anne Yuki Eastman's meditative video, "Snow Cows," shows animals weathering a winter storm. A diamond lodged high in the wall is the sum total of Tobias Wong's "Ice Solitaire." Kori Newkirk's "Belvue Gardens" is a neon snowflake bent against the floor. And Andrea Claire takes the term "Cool Jazz" to a whole new level with a refrigerator full of beer and a burbling soundtrack of voices recorded at the exhibition's opening in "A Spot, and Some Time, and a Bar (Bill Evans Live at the Village Vanguard Recorded in June 1961)." Through Sept. 2. (Dee, 545 W. 20th St. 212-924-7545.)

"SOME EXHAUST"

Matthew Lusk has organized a show that takes the gallery's building back to the days before Rem Koolhaas redesigned it, when it was a Penske truck depot. He's covered the walls and ceiling with Sheetrock and the floor with rough concrete board, and filled the place with work that suggests the refuse that piles up in garage corners. Rachel Owens makes flowers out of broken beer bottles, and Bryan Crockett has hung a spiderweb that reads "You Will Never Know" over a doorway. Lara Kohl's deep freezer holds an ice sculpture of Snow White's castle and a speaker whose music grows faint when the lid is closed. In John Gerrard's computer program, a video version of the gallery is slowly obscured by exhaust from an animated engine; it's an alarming companion to Caroline Allison's photographs of teen suicide sites, many of them suburban garages. Through Sept. 25. (Lehmann Maupin, 540 W. 26th St. 212-255-2923.)

GALLERIES-DOWNTOWN

"BREATH"

The Iranian artist Shirazeh Houshiary and her husband and collaborator, Pip Horne, have installed a white tower on the public plaza of the Battery Park Ritz-Carlton. The tower's twelve courses of ceramic bricks are set inches apart and spiral twenty feet up. Hushed prayers—Buddhist, Jewish, Islamic, Christian—emerge from the gaps between the overlapping bricks. The tower, which cannot help but evoke the World Trade Center, looks especially lovely in the Lower Manhattan dusk, and the low volume of the prayers is meant to draw the passerby to within inches, an intentionally gentle contrast to the explosiveness of religious zeal. Through Jan. 15. (2 West St. For more information, call Creative Time, at 212-206-6674.)

"INNOCENCE FOUND"

A show in which dewy purity, put under close scrutiny, starts to seem a bit rancid. Loretta Lux photographs a little girl in a princess-bride outfit with a far-away expression suggestive of bad things to come; in a suite of drawings by the Clayton brothers, feral-looking children dressed as Power Rangers are admonished to "be nice to animals." The sweet beasties fare no better: David Humphrey paints kittens who are inexplicably menaced by a loaf of white bread, and Tapp Francke's image of an earnest bull terrier is mutely tragic. Through Sept. 4. (DFN, 176 Franklin St. 212-334-3400.)

"REMBRANDT AND THE ART OF PRINTMAKING"

Glue stains, watermarks, and pinholes help authenticate prints created during Rembrandt's lifetime (1606-69) and on into the eighteenth century. Significant etchings include "The Goldweigher's Field" (1651), an early depiction of Holland's exceedingly flat landscape, and a 1652 sketch entitled "Christ Disputing with the Doctors." A group of unfinished works—notably "Artist Drawing from Model" (1639)—will interest those who enjoyed the recent exhibition at the Frick. Through Sept. 7. (Franklin Bowles, 431 West Broadway. 212-226-1616.)

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PHOTOGRAPHY

RUDY BURCKHARDT
A small but moving show of art-world portraits and cityscapes taken between the thirties and the fifties by the Swiss-born filmmaker and photographer, who died in 1999. Pictures of New York City landmarks—the Flatiron Building, Astor Place—hang beside portraits of artists such as Willem and Elaine de Kooning, Jackson Pollock, and Mark Rothko. Through Sept. 11. (De Nagy, 724 Fifth Ave. 212-262-5050.)

CHIP HOOPER
Using a view camera, Hooper takes extraordinarily detailed photographs of the interaction between water and light along the Pacific Ocean. In some pictures the waves roil and fog blocks out the sun, creating a virtually unified field of gray. In others, the sun on still water makes a block of light that falls in a hard line into the ocean. Through Sept. 18. (Mann, 210 Eleventh Ave. 212-989-7600.)

"WOMEN OF MEXICO"
Black-and-white photographs by five female photographers who were inspired, in one way or another, by Manuel Alvarez Bravo. Lola Alvarez Bravo, with whom Mariana Yampolsky studied, was his wife; Flor Garduño and Graciela Iturbide were his assistants; and Marcela Taboada sits on the board of the Alvarez Bravo Photographic Center, in Oaxaca. Most of their subjects are indigenous Mexican women and girls. Iturbide's "Our Lady of the Iguanas," a famous image from 1979, in which a sturdy market woman poses with a crown of eight large lizards on her head, was made only after the photographer had spent days selling vegetables with her subject. Through Sept. 18. (Throckmorton, 145 E. 57th St. 212-223-1059.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY / ASIA SOCIETY
A show of recent photography and videos from China, "Between Past and Future," fills both museums with a hundred and thirty works by sixty young artists. The incredibly fast transformation of Chinese society is the central theme. Riffing on traditional Chinese scroll painting, Wang Qingsong places an officially denounced art critic at the center of his updating of the "Night Revels of Lao Li," from the tenth century. Wang Wei backlights a long line of color transparencies placed on the floor, portraits of himself underwater, forcing the viewer to walk across his face. Liu Zheng's black-and-white portraits of women mourning at a country funeral and masked revellers at a New Year's Eve party elegantly evoke the stark contrasts in the new China. Sze Tsung Leong's large color prints showing demolished traditional architecture are sad reflections on the country's manic race to build. Through Sept. 4. (International Center of Photography, 1133 Sixth Ave. 212-857-0000; Asia Society, 725 Park Ave. 212-288-6400.)

Short List

"DO"
Pace/MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. 212-759-7999. Through Aug. 31.

CLASSICAL MUSIC CONCERTS IN TOWN

"SCHUMANN SCORES ON BROADWAY"
Trinity Church's summerlong series devoted to the music of the febrile Romantic genius concludes with a performance of the two Song Cycles (Op. 24 and Op. 39) on poems by Heine and Eichendorff by the tenor Steven Tharp; Mark Shapiro accompanies him. (Broadway at Wall St. Sept. 2 at 1. No tickets required.)

BARGEMUSIC
The venerable guitar dominates the programming for Labor Day weekend. Sept. 2 at 7:30: The flutist Lance Suzuki and the guitarist David Leisner offer a program of Schubert song transcriptions ("Ständchen" and "Die Post") along with music by Bach (the Chaconne from the Partita No. 2 for Solo Violin) and Ginastera. ♦ Sept. 3 at 7:30: An exceptionally varied program from the baritone Chris Pedro Trakas and the guitarist Simon Wynberg includes songs by Spohr and Weber (a fine guitarist himself), standards by Ellington, Van Heusen, and George Shearing, and a pair of Greek melodies. ♦ Sept. 4 at 7:30 and Sept. 5 at 4: Trakas and Wynberg are joined by a string quartet (which includes the violinist Mark Peskanov) for a concert of works by Paganini, Rodrigo, and Boccherini, among others. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

ST. PATRICK'S CATHEDRAL ORGAN SERIES
Christopher Garven, the organist of the Church of the Good Samaritan in Paoli, Pennsylvania, offers a recital of solo works by Gigout, Bach (the "St. Anne" Fugue), and Messiaen, along with an improvisation on the hymn "Wondrous Love." (Fifth Ave. at 51st St. Sept. 5 at 4:45. No tickets required.)

OUT OF TOWN

WOODSTOCK FRINGE FESTIVAL 2004: "AMERICAN SONGFEST"
By Labor Day weekend, most of the Northeast's classical festivals have closed up for the summer, but the Catskills region soldiers on. Larry Alan Smith, the former dean of the Hartt School of Music and a respected composer of songs, heads up the classical section of the Byrdcliffe artist colony's theatrical series. Sept. 1 at 8: "Songs of the Darkness," an evening featuring the soprano Catherine Thorpe (with flute and guitar accompaniment) singing American songs by Smith and by the young composers Lief Ellis and Thomas Schuttenhelm. ♦ Sept. 4 at 2: The young bass-baritone Charles Mays, Jr.—a finalist in the Metropolitan Opera's 2004 National Council Auditions—offers a vibrant program of songs by Barber, Bolcom, Copland, and the African-American pianist Margaret Bonds, along with a selection of spirituals. (St. Gregory's Church, Woodstock, N.Y. 845-679-0167.)

WINDHAM CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL
Ursula Oppens, perhaps best known for her passionate advocacy of such modern masters as Elliott Carter and Magnus Lindberg, spends some of her time at the summer festivals exploring the traditional repertory, to which she brings a compelling blend of clarity and warmth. She is the guest of the Mendelssohn String Quartet, who perform a program of works by Mozart, Beethoven (the Quartet in F Major, Op. 18, No. 1), and Brahms (the Piano Quintet in F Minor) at the up-and-coming Catskills series. (Windham Performing Arts Center, Windham, N.Y. 518-734-6378. Sept. 4 at 8.)

SKANEATELES FESTIVAL
Twenty-five years ago, David and Louise Robinson decided that the Finger Lakes region needed some high-class summer chamber music. Their festival, named for the lake on which their house sits (orchestra concerts are still given on the spacious porch), has maintained a small-town feel even while attracting such talents as the conductor David Zinman and the guitarist Eliot Fisk. The season's final concerts feature the violinist Hilary Hahn, a beloved figure in Skaneateles, who has played at the festival every year since the age of twelve. Sept. 2 at 8: An all-Mozart evening features Hahn along with the pianists Diane Walsh and Natalie Zhu, performing such works as the Violin Sonata in E Minor, K. 304, and the Sonata in F Major for Piano Four Hands, K. 497. ♦ Sept. 4 at 8: Hahn performs Prokofiev's Violin Concerto No. 1 in a concert that also includes music by Vaughan Williams (the Overture to "The Wasps") and Mendelssohn-Bartholdy (the "Scotch" Symphony); Peter Bay conducts the festival orchestra. (Skaneateles High School, Skaneateles, N.Y. 315-685-7418.)

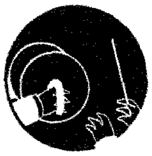
MAVERICK CONCERTS
Sept. 4 at 8: You might have to thumb through a big, old dictionary to find it, but the word "melo-

drama" doesn't just apply to outsized emotions. During much of the nineteenth century it was also a viable genre—music written as background to a dramatic recitation—to which such composers as Schumann and Liszt made important contributions. The most famous melodrama is one of the last, Richard Strauss's "Enoch Arden," written as an accompaniment to Tennyson's poem. (Claude Rains, of "Casablanca" fame, made a stirring recording of it with Glenn Gould.) The veteran actor Alvin Epstein, renowned for his Shakespeare and Beckett, performs it with Babette Hierholzer, a sensitive and unshowy pianist in the German tradition, who begins the evening with solo works by Mozart and Schumann (the appropriately colorful "Carnaval"). ♦ Sept. 5 at 3: The Borromeo String Quartet, a wonderfully smart and elegant young ensemble, closes the woodland hall's eighty-ninth season with music by Haydn, Janáček (the Quartet No. 2, "Intimate Letters"), and Brahms (the Quartet in A Minor, Op. 51, No. 2). (Woodstock, N.Y. For more information, call 845-679-8217.)

MUSIC MOUNTAIN

The chamber-music festival wraps up its seventy-fifth season with two concerts by the pianist Ruth Laredo, a graceful veteran, and the young and impressively disciplined Shanghai String Quartet. Sept. 4 at 8: Music for piano and strings by Turina and Beethoven (the Piano Quartet in E-Flat Major, Op. 16), along with selections from "China Song," a suite by the group's second violinist, Yi-Wen Jiang. ♦ Sept. 5 at 3: Dvořák's ebullient Piano Quintet in A Major receives the last of the summer's many performances, on a program that also includes probing quartets by Haydn (the magisterial Op. 76, No. 1, in G Major) and Janáček (the First Quartet, a work inspired by Tolstoy's story "The Kreutzer Sonata"). (Routes 63 and 126, Falls Village, Conn. 860-824-7126. Aug. 29 at 3.)

CLASSICAL NOTES



CHORAL CAPITALS

Haydn's "The Seasons," like a late volume of Proust, is much admired but rarely experienced these days, and René Jacobs's new recording (on Harmonia Mundi) manages to retrieve the sense of excitement that Haydn's early audiences must have felt. The ultra-classical composer, in one of his final works, responded to James Thomson's pastoral poem with the sensitivity of a young Romantic. As he revels in the buzzing of insects, the braying of hounds, the babbling of brooks, or (with dark and swaying strings) the "blind flight of vultures" to their "gloomy caverns," Haydn seems on the verge of becoming Berlioz—thanks to Jacobs, who draws out big sounds and sumptuous colors from the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra. The lead singers—the soprano Marlis Petersen, the tenor Werner Güra, and the baritone Dietrich Henschel—are all superb, and the members of the R.I.A.S. Chamber Choir take on Haydn's demanding choral writing with the agility of soloists.

Schoenberg, who was even more Viennese than Haydn, explores the heavenly city of Jacob's dream in his unfinished expressionist masterpiece "Die Jakobsleiter" ("Jacob's Ladder"). His recondite text for the oratorio, which draws on the Bible, Swedenborg, and Balzac, could occupy a philosophy department for years, but its spiritual essence is powerful, and the music has a visceral impact that more than makes up for its rugged atonality. (The last measures, in which two coloratura sopranos vault their way into the ether, are breathtaking.) Dietrich Henschel, in another Harmonia Mundi release, brings his elegantly sculpted voice to the role of the angel Gabriel, and the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin and Berlin Radio Choir—led by the visionary American conductor Kent Nagano—perform with both passion and virtuosity.

The magnificent High Gothic nave of New York's Saint Thomas Church invites a quieter, more refined type of spiritual expression, and for the last eighty-five years the church's renowned Choir of Men and Boys has filled it with a tastefully luxuriant sound. In one of his final recordings with the choir, Gerre Hancock, who has directed it since 1971, leads the group (and a very committed Orchestra of St. Luke's) in a noble reading of the Fauré Requiem (Koch). There are certainly more glamorous versions of this piece on disk, but Hancock's, which uses John Rutter's intimate orchestration (based on Fauré's first performances), conveys the delicate sense of piety that the composer intended.

—Russell Platt

ABOVE AND BEYOND

THE LEGEND

As a child, Earl (the Goat) Manigault, the late king of New York City street basketball, paraded around his Harlem neighborhood with ten-pound weights on his ankles. His friends laughed, but he could dunk before he was out of elementary school, and he became a high-school star in the early sixties. He could probably have gone on to the pros, but Manigault—who died of heart disease in 1998, at the age of fifty-three—developed a drug addiction and instead reigned on the playgrounds of New York City. In the early seventies, to help prevent kids from making the same mistakes he did, he started the Goat basketball tournament. Now run by his son, Darrin Dunn, the games are played at the official Goat Courts, on the Upper West Side. The world has changed since Manigault began assembling teams (the famous Rucker Park games, in Harlem, are on the N.B.A.'s network; the multimedia impresario Damon Dash has a team in the Kingdome Basketball Tournament), but his gritty tournament endures, although in a slightly different form. This year the competitors include boys, girls, and women, but no grown men. "Street ball is never calm and quiet," Dunn says. "But the women just come to play ball." (Amsterdam Ave. between 98th and 99th Sts. Games start at six on weekdays, with a championship set for Sept. 4 at 2. For more information, call 917-657-3625.)

WEST INDIAN CARNIVAL CELEBRATIONS

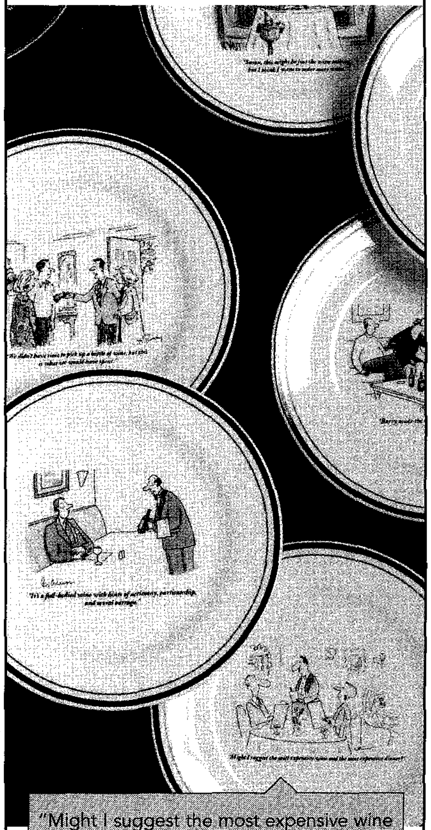
The loud and colorful parade down Eastern Parkway, in Brooklyn, on Labor Day, will draw millions of revellers, but there are many other related events, including four nights of concerts on the grounds of the Brooklyn Museum, starting Sept. 2. The shows include an event called "Steelband Panorama," in which local bands compete for awards, on Saturday night, and a program of music from the Caribbean basin on Sunday night at 7, featuring the Baron, Lord Nelson, Scrunter, Singing Sandra, and others. (See This Week.) (Concerts, unless otherwise noted, are at 8; the parade runs all day. For more information, call 718-467-1797.)

READINGS

Sept. 1 at 8: "DEMO: A Demonstration in Words" brings together Grace Paley, Sonia Sanchez, Carl Hancock Rux, and many other poets and writers for a night of protest literature. (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. No tickets necessary.) ♦ Sept. 5 at 7:30: Dancers, poets, musicians, writers, singers, and other friends of John Cage each get four minutes and thirty-three seconds to celebrate the composer's birthday. (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery. No tickets necessary.)

TALK

Sept. 1 at 7: A discussion of the 2000 election with Mark Danner, the author of "The Road to Illegitimacy," and Renata Adler, whose books include "Irreparable Harm." They are joined by Dennis Loy Johnson, who recently wrote about the Inauguration Day protest in "The Big Chill." (Housing Works Used Book Café, 126 Crosby St. No tickets necessary.)



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MOVIES OPENING

THE COOKOUT
A basketball player (Quran Pender) throws a barbecue party after he gets signed to the N.B.A., in a comedy directed by Lance Rivera. With Queen Latifah. Opening Sept. 3.

PAPARAZZI
Paul Abascal directed this thriller, in which a movie star (Cole Hauser) takes revenge on celebrity photographers. Opening Sept. 3.

PERSONS OF INTEREST
A documentary about Muslim Americans who were detained by the U.S. government after 9/11. Directed by Alison Maclean and Tobias Perse. Opening Sept. 3. (Cinema Village.)

RED LIGHTS
Cédric Kahn's thriller begins with a husband and wife arguing while on the way to pick up their children at camp. With Carole Bouquet and Jean-Pierre Darroussin. In French. Opening Sept. 3. (Angelika Film Center.)

REMEMBER ME, MY LOVE
A drama about a married Italian man in his forties (Fabrizio Bentivoglio) who takes up with an old flame (Monica Bellucci). Directed by Gabriele Muccino ("The Last Kiss"). In Italian. Opening Sept. 3. (Paris and Sunshine Cinema.)

TAE GUK GI: THE BROTHERHOOD OF WAR
Kang Je-gyu directed this epic film about two brothers who fight for South Korea in the Korean War. In Korean. Opening Sept. 3.

VANITY FAIR
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Sept. 1.

VIRGIN
A teen-age girl (Elisabeth Moss) in a small Baptist town believes that she might be carrying the next Christ child, in a drama written and directed by Deborah Kampmeier. With Robin Wright Penn. Opening Sept. 3.

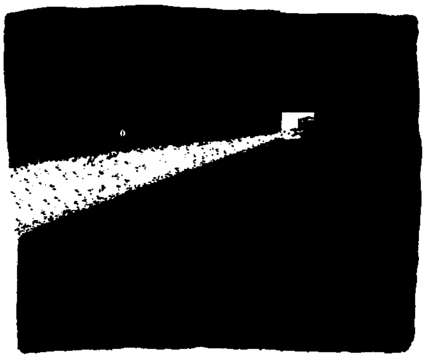
WARRIORS OF HEAVEN AND EARTH
He Ping wrote and directed this historical epic, in which an imperial swordsman (Nakao Kiichi) and a disgraced soldier (Jiang Wen) must fight off bandits before they face each other. In Mandarin. Opening Sept. 3. (Angelika Film Center.)

WICKER PARK
In a thriller directed by Paul McGuigan, Josh Hartnett plays a Chicago investment banker searching for his long-lost love (Diane Kruger), who vanished mysteriously. Opening Sept. 3.

FILM NOTES

ALIEN VS. PREDATOR
Twentieth Century Fox goes for the quick bucks with a franchise-damaging rip-off. Directed by Paul W. S. Anderson, this sci-fi adventure about an ancient pyramid that provokes a showdown between the two classic movie aliens should have been acid-slinging fun. Instead, there's endlessly boring exposition, by-the-book characters, and dimly lit set pieces that mask the low-end production budget. Fans will shed a tear when they see how the frightening and wondrous alien designs by Stan Winston and H. R. Giger are thrown around like so much garbage.—*Bruce Diones* (Battery Park 11, Chelsea West, East 85th Street, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

BEFORE SUNSET
A lovely sequel to "Before Sunrise," the charmingly diminutive romantic movie that Richard Linklater made in 1995, in which Jesse (Ethan Hawke), a footloose young American, and Celine (Julie Delpy), a French student, spent a night together in Vienna. Nine years have gone by, and Jesse, now a novelist, is hawking a book in Paris, where he runs into Celine, who has become an earnest international health worker. Jesse is supposed to fly home later that day, but they agree to walk around the Left Bank. Like the earlier movie, "Before Sunset" turns into an orgy of talk—flirtatious, soulful, boastful, self-deprecating talk, some of it borderline pretentious but all of it utterly convincing as the intelligent and foolish things said by people who connect through their tastes, ideas, and passions. The drama emerges from the movie's form: it plays in real time, and for about eighty minutes, as Linklater's camera gravely follows these two around, we wonder whether Jesse will go home to his wife and child or allow himself to be fascinated, once again, by a serious young woman given to melancholy self-revelation.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 7/5/04.) (Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, and Lincoln Square.)

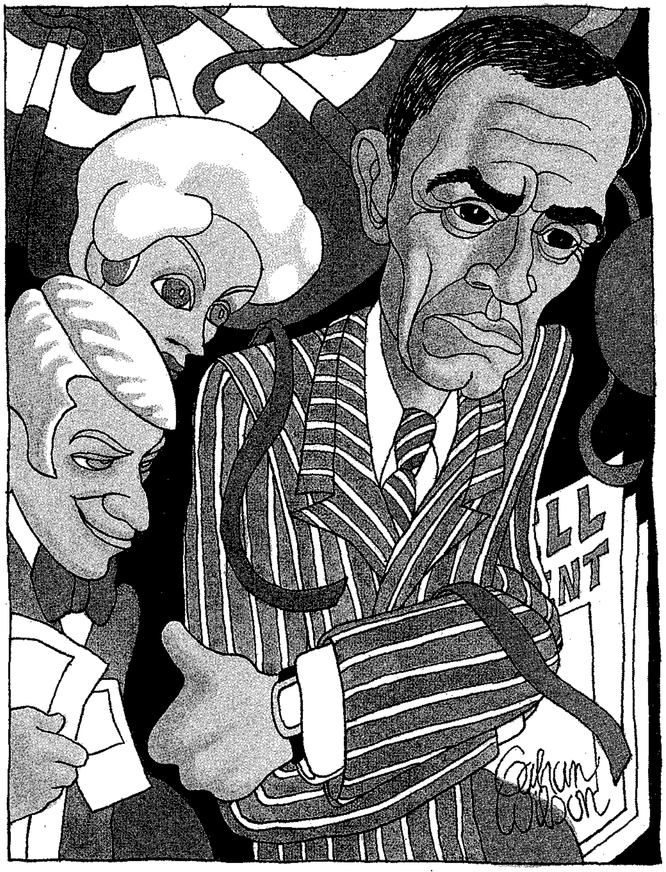


THE BEST MAN
Gore Vidal's political melodrama is about a convention at which the two chief contestants for the party's nomination are an Adlai Stevenson type (Henry Fonda) and a Joe McCarthy type (Cliff Robertson). The film has a lot of verve. It has the look of crackling intelligence thanks to Haskell Wexler's black-and-white cinematography and Franklin Schaffner's sure, fast-paced direction. It seems like a hot, inside view even though Vidal sets the issues in terms of a slick, simplistic ends-and-means morality play, and throws in the kind of clever, self-congratulatory topical jokes that sound dated the first time you hear them. Originally released in 1964.—*Pauline Kael* (Moving Image; Sept. 4-5.)

THE BOURNE SUPREMACY
Fast, faster, and fastest—that's the way the cutting rate goes in this sequel to "The Bourne Identity." The director, Paul Greengrass, jumps ahead within scenes, then jumps again. Greengrass is like a man breathing so fast that he never draws much oxygen into his lungs. Yet, of its kind, "The Bourne Supremacy" is incredibly skilled. Greengrass arranges pursuits and escapes that fly like arrows. He tears up staid old Moscow in a car chase and turns routine C.I.A. procedural stuff—people looking at computer screens and barking code names and other gibberish at each other—into nerve-racking contests of will. The movie is stripped down for action, and its hero—the survivor of a botched operation who suffers from amnesia—has no identity beyond his superlative physical skills and a vague sense of guilt. Harried, chased, both hunted and hunter, the blunt-nosed Matt Damon is a superhero reduced to pure reflex, yet, by means of his isolation and his stoicism, he becomes almost a romantic figure. Set in Goa, Naples, Berlin, Moscow, and, should you blink, perhaps Madagascar and Sardinia, too. With Joan Allen, Brian Cox, Julia Stiles, and Franke Potente. Adapted by Tony Gilroy from a Robert Ludlum novel.—*D.D.* (8/9 & 16/04) (Battery Park 11, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

BRIGHT LEAVES
The documentarian Ross McElwee travels through North Carolina to uncover the riches-to-rags history of his great-grandfather, who developed the Bull Durham tobacco blend. As in his previous films, McElwee seems to be an ever-wandering, camera-wielding student of cinéma vérité. Among other things, he interviews cancer patients, attends a tobacco auction, and discovers an old Gary Cooper film that may have something to do with his great-grandfather. Because he documents so much of his life, McElwee's work has an unusual emotional complexity. He also makes his personal story relevant and entertaining, using family history to provide a revelatory look at the legacy of tobacco.—*B.D.* (Film Forum.)

BRIGHT YOUNG THINGS
Evelyn Waugh's early satirical novel "Vile Bodies" has a special brittleness that makes it unique in fiction. The young, upper-class London socialites—the Throbbings and Miles Malpractice and the rest—strike attitudes, rattle on without ever saying what they mean, fall in and out of ridiculous scrapes, and party, party, party. The trouble is, one cannot photograph Waugh's prose, which has the slender, hard clarity of a bitter lyric poem. Stephen Fry's adaptation of the book lays on a heavy dose of period production design and whirls about madly, and, here and there, the actors have funny or touching moments, especially Fenella Woolgar, who plays the daft Agatha Runcible ("too, too shaming"). But mostly the movie feels



At Moving Image, "The Best Man" and other political films.

GAHAN WILSON

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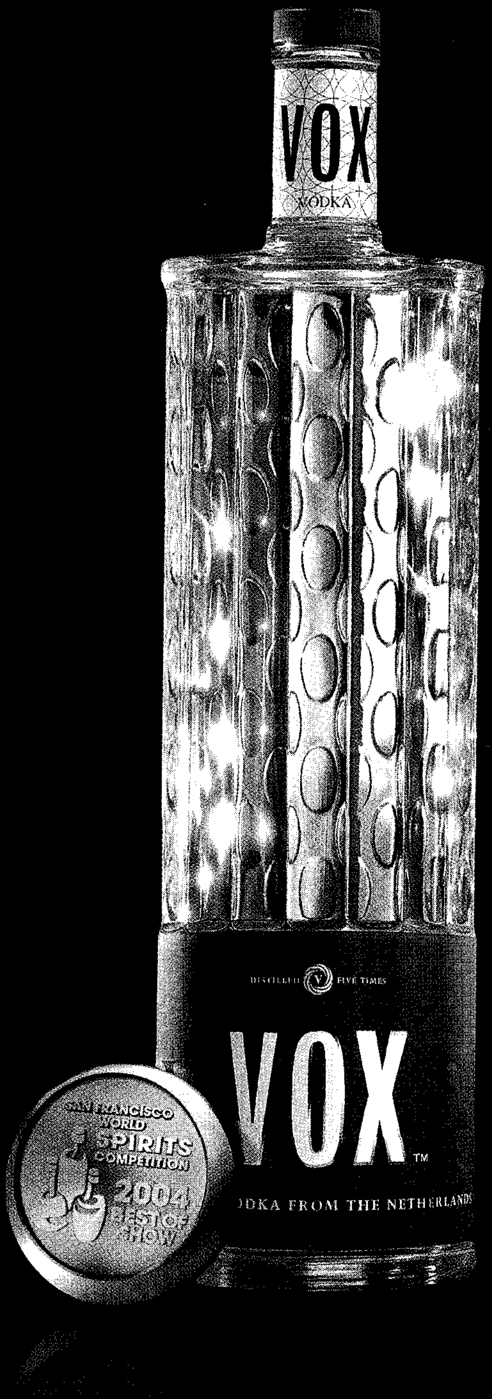
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overwrought and insubstantial. One looks at a handsome young stage actor like Stephen Campbell Moore, who, as the hero, Adam Fenwick-Symes, has penetrating eyes, and one thinks, Why is this fine-looking young man behaving in such a feckless and stupid way? With Emily Mortimer, Michael Sheen, James McAvoy, Jim Broadbent, Dan Aykroyd as a bellowing Canadian press lord, and Stockard Channing as the American revivalist, Mrs. Melrose Ape.—*D.D.* (Angelika Film Center, Chelsea Cinemas, and Cinema 2.)

COLLATERAL

Tom Cruise as an assassin in a silver-gray suit shows up in Los Angeles at dusk and expects to leave at dawn. His job: to eliminate five witnesses in an impending federal prosecution of a drug cartel. He bullies a sweet-tempered taxi-driver, one Max Durocher (Jamie Foxx), into providing transportation all through the night, and "Collateral" turns into a kind of convoluted buddy movie, in which the two men engage in a weird, terse dialogue about murder. The plot of "Collateral," which was directed by Michael Mann, is just a movie-ish contrivance, and the violence is no more than thuggishly casual and chic—that is, very enjoyable. But shot by shot, scene by scene, Mann may be the best director in Hollywood. Methodical and precise, he analyzes a scene into minute components—a door closing, an arm thrust out—and gathers the fragments into seamless units; he wants you to live inside the physical event, not just experience the sensation of it. "Collateral" comes off like clockwork, but it's a clock that breathes—great actors like Mark Ruffalo, Javier Bardem, and Barry Shabaka Henley have sustained, intricate moments in the pauses between the violent acts. With Jada Pinkett Smith. Written by Stuart Beattie. Shot largely with digital cameras by Dion Beebe and Paul Cameron.—*D.D.* (8/9 & 16/04) (Battery Park 11, Beekman, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Ziegfeld.)

FAHRENHEIT 9/11

Michael Moore's new documentary is an incendiary and viciously funny attack on the Bush Administration—a whirlwind of political charges, sinister implications, and derision—in which the President comes off as a betrayer and fool who has all the substance of a stuffed doll. Moore accuses Bush of handing part of America's sovereignty over to the Saudis; he implies that the President, after 9/11, was more effective at frightening the electorate than at pursuing the terrorists; he presents America as an oligarchy in which the wealthy control everything while luring the dispossessed to "volunteer" in endless wars. Saying that pieces of this are true, or partly true, or true when joined to counterclaims—isn't the Army mostly a boon for the working class?—doesn't settle the journalistic issue. The movie's more radical allegations, which arrive like a shower of poison darts, are impossible to sort out and evaluate, and Moore often joins facetious narration to highly edited clips in a way that recalls the agitprop techniques of dictatorial regimes. The movie is sensational entertainment for those already convinced but may repel the uncommitted. There are a number of powerful sections, however, that are impossible to dismiss, particularly the story of Lila Lipscomb, a Flint, Michigan, mother who loses her son in the Iraq war and, giving way to unappeasable grief, makes a half-crazed pilgrimage to the White House.—*D.D.* (6/28/04) (Empire 25, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, and Village Theatre VII.)

GARDEN STATE

Andrew Largeman (Zach Braff), a struggling actor, arrives in his native New Jersey with some extra baggage: his paraplegic mother has possibly committed suicide, he's been on Zoloft since forever, and his one major acting credit is as a retarded quarterback. This would be a difficult burden for any young man, let alone a début movie. But Braff, who also wrote and directed, keeps the tone light with some funny homecoming scenes. There's a party where Large is greeted as "Jersey's De Niro," a run-in with a high-school friend turned cop, and, like a winning bass line, the smirking wit of his slacker friend Mark (Peter Sarsgaard). The movie is also lifted by the presence of Natalie Portman, perhaps the ultimate ethereal home-town girl. Braff eventually takes the movie to emotional places where only the extremely tenderhearted will follow, but there are a lot of resonant moments, and a moody, introspective soundtrack.—*Michael Agger* (Battery Park 11, Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

HAROLD & KUMAR GO TO WHITE CASTLE

A stoner comedy starring "persons of colors." Harold (John Cho) is a Korean investment banker, and his best friend, Kumar (Kal Penn), is a South Asian smart aleck avoiding medical school. The talky script presents white people as an ethnic group like any other, worthy of mockery (extreme-sports guys) and praise (John Hughes movies). Despite that innovation, Harold and Kumar encounter the usual teen-movie setups, right down to the encounter with the faded television celebrity (Neil Patrick Harris, a.k.a. Doogie Howser, M.D.). The movie is worth seeing for its manhandling of political correctness and Penn's irreverent charisma—just don't expect a revolution.—*M.A.* (Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, and Union Square.)

HERO

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema 1, East 86th Street Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, and Union Square.)

I, ROBOT

It's Will Smith versus the machines in this extremely loose adaptation of a series of Isaac Asimov stories. Directed by the fantasist Alex Proyas ("Dark City," "The Crow"), the movie is a C.G.I. extravaganza, full of gleaming surfaces and moody lighting in the manner of Edward Hopper. The robots themselves have beautiful ice-blue eyes, and the Chicago cityscapes have a "Blade Runner"-like intricacy. The studly Smith (he has a swoon-inducing shower scene) suspects that one of the latest models of a new robot line has committed murder, and the plot becomes a succession of chases that are progressively exciting. There's not much in the way of clever dialogue (the dreaded Akiva Goldsman had a hand in the script), but Proyas has a real facility for this kind of speculative storytelling.—*B.D.* (Battery Park 11, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

THE MANCHURIAN CANDIDATE

The famous original, from 1962, written by George Axelrod, from a Richard Condon novel, and directed by John Frankenheimer, was a satire of Cold War anxieties that cut both ways, attacking both the far right and the far left. Acidulous and brazenly absurd, the movie was a one-of-a-kind mainstream picture, with startling oddities that people talked about for years. This updated version, written by Daniel Pyne and Dean Georgias and directed by Jonathan Demme, is doggedly, wretchedly earnest. A shadowy big company reminiscent of Halliburton or the Carlyle Group attempts to take over the White House by placing a computer chip in the brain of a war hero turned congressman (Liev Shreiber) who is under the control of his reactionary mother (Meryl Streep), a senator unaccountably made up to look like Hillary Clinton. What was satire of paranoia in the old movie has been turned into just plain paranoia. The bad memories of the hero (Denzel Washington), who suspects that the war hero is a fake, are accompanied by the conventional horror-film frights of painted faces, spooky doctors, and smoky, distorted cinematography. The movie is overwrought and unfocussed, and there isn't a joke in it anywhere.—*D.D.* (8/9 & 16/04) (Battery Park 11, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Twin, New York Twin, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

MARIA FULL OF GRACE

In this superbly poised independent film, Maria (Catalina Sandino Moreno), a willful seventeen-year-old, unhappily pregnant and stuck in a factory job, agrees to serve as a "mule," carrying in her stomach little pellets of heroin from her native Colombia to New Jersey. Joshua Marston, a thirty-five-year-old N.Y.U. film-school graduate, nosed around Colombia and New York's immigrant neighborhoods before beginning to shoot

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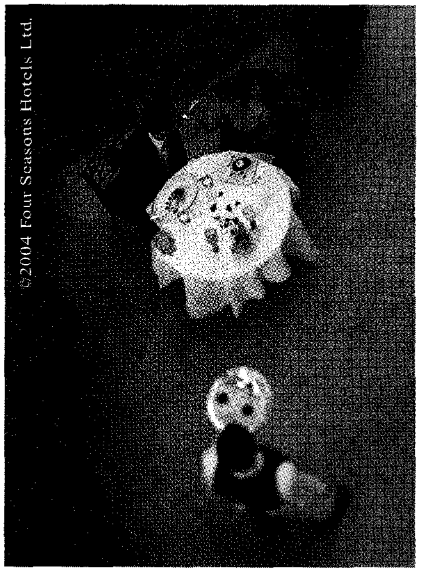
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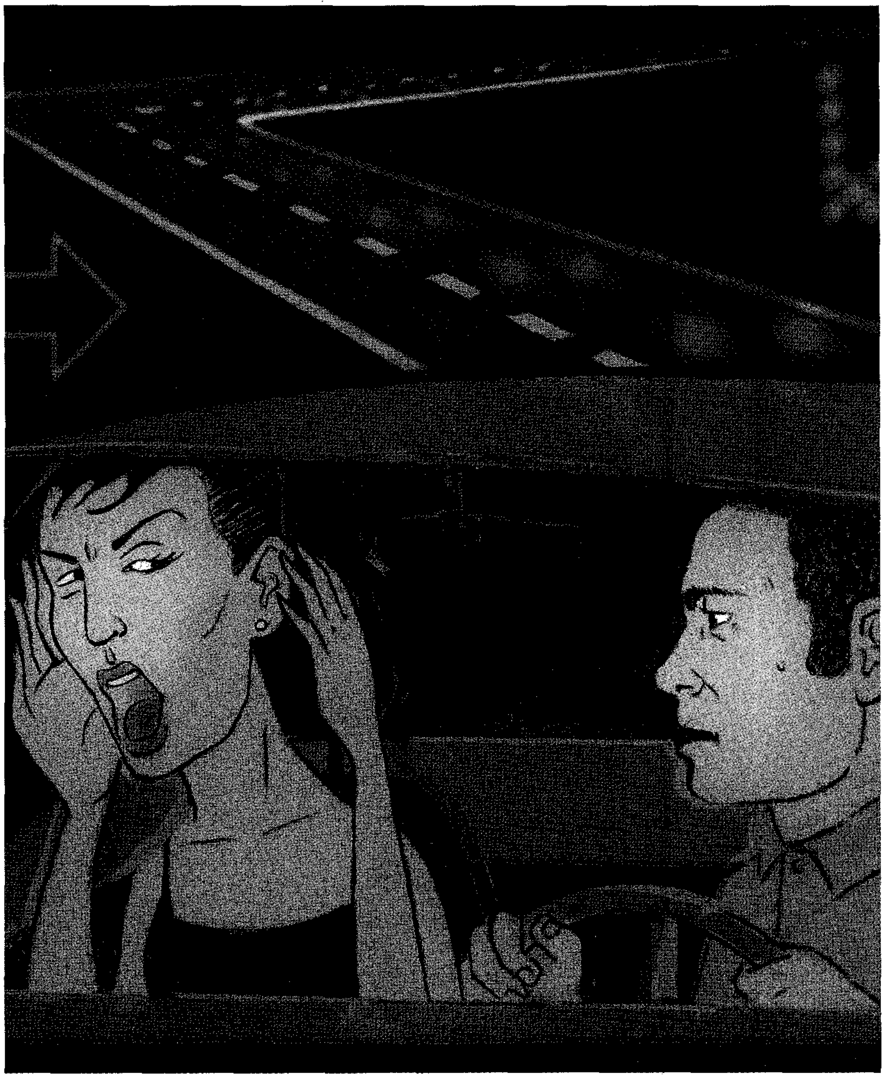
"Maria," his first full-length feature, and the way he dramatized the material seems instinctively right: he goes step by step, detail by detail, emotion by emotion, eliding nothing, exaggerating nothing. In his calm and lucid way, Marston has made one of the emblematic coming-to-America stories of our time.—*D.D.* (7/26/04) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Sunshine Cinema, and Sutton 1 and 2.)

MEAN CREEK

An outstanding performance by Josh Peck as a young schoolyard bully who's invited out to a party on a river, where a group of kids plan his comeuppance, anchors this suspenseful and elegiac film. The writer and director Jacob Aaron Estes gives his marvellous cast (which includes Rory Culkin and Scott Mechlowicz) the kind of youthful, textured dialogue that feels naturally captured. The ebb and flow of the scenes generates a nervous power and a haunting sense of the inevitable.—*B.D.* (First & 62nd Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)



Opening September 3, "Red Lights," a thriller directed by Cédric Kahn.

EDEL RODRIGUEZ

MEDIUM COOL

Haskell Wexler shot, directed, wrote, and co-produced this staggeringly ambitious 1969 release, a Godardian blend of fact and fiction about the disillusionment of a TV cameraman (Robert Forster) and his involvement with a transplanted Appalachian mother and son (Verna Bloom and Harold Blankenship) before and during the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago. Although the characters are skimpily developed and the connections between them and the headlines sometimes forced, Wexler has an uncanny talent for analyzing actual events visually, on the run, with maximum limpidity and impact. There are several knockout sequences. In the most emblematic moment, the riot squads shoot tear gas at the protesters outside the Convention as a voice exclaims, "Look out, Haskell, it's real!"—*Michael Sragow* (Moving Image; Sept. 4-5.)

METALLICA: SOME KIND OF MONSTER

A documentary by Joe Berlinger and Bruce Sinofsky about life off the road, and off the rails, for the mega-selling metal rock band. The filmmakers worked for almost two years, during a turbulent and disturbing time in the group's long career. When egos clash during the recording of a new album, the group's label hires a high-priced therapist to sort through the conflict (as time goes on the therapist takes himself so seriously he ostensibly becomes part of the band). The movie captures sometimes funny, sometimes uncomfortable scenes of the creative process, and also includes interviews with old and new band members, as well as the seemingly obligatory lead-singer-in-rehab scenario. And, while it can be argued that all of this is the norm for a high-end rock-and-roll life style, the film works hard to demystify the multimillionaire band, showing them as a bunch of guys embarrassingly exposed, like teen-agers on a first date.—*B.D.* (Union Square and Village East Cinemas.)

NAPOLEON DYNAMITE

Deadpan Idaho Dada. The very young married team of Jared Hess (writer and director) and Jerusha Hess (writer), working in Preston, Idaho, Jared's home town, dig into the weird, flat tonalities of loserdom. Their hero, Napoleon (Jon Heder), a high-school senior, can't find anyone to play tetherball with him and gets ritually slammed into lockers by the school toughs. Yet Napoleon is oddly self-possessed; he speaks with an indignant snarl and confronts people without doing them the honor of opening his eyes and looking at them. The Hesses surround this stubborn nerd with wan dreamers and dim failures who don't see themselves as failures—their inexplicable belief in themselves is the movie's most hopeful element. Many of the scenes are brief vignettes punctuated with intentionally awkward physical comedy. The Hesses make jokes out of affectlessness and drabness—the nowheresville prefab tackiness of the houses and the emptiness of a patch of country so remote that not even popular culture touches it. The movie might have worked if it weren't so dead-aired, malicious, and cool.—*D.D.* (Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, 64th and 2nd, and Sunshine Cinema.)

NICOTINA

The other "Y Tu Mamá También" heartthrob, Diego Luna, stars in this seductive Mexican film about a group of wannabe con artists on a fateful night in Mexico City. The director, Hugo Rodriguez, tells a quick, energetic tale—involving computer hacking and Russian diamond smugglers—and the cigarette-smoking cast (they're a very nervous bunch) get caught in a comedy-of-errors plot that leads to a considerable body count. The picture's high jinks, piled-on coincidences, and tough-guy dialogue aren't convincing, but there's a breezy flair to the film that keeps it alive. In Spanish.—*B.D.* (Lincoln Square, Sunshine Cinema, and 34th Street Theatre.)

OPEN WATER

Chris Kentis's expertly made thriller is about a yuppie couple stranded in the Caribbean after they are mistakenly abandoned on a scuba-diving excursion. The handheld-camera work (by Laura Lau) and no-budget ocean settings combine for an unflinchingly realistic ordeal. Kentis drifts his two more-than-game actors (Blanchard Ryan and Daniel Travis) farther and farther out to sea, into shark-infested waters, and the suspenseful, anything-can-happen moments are unrelenting. There's a sublime indifference to suffering in this film that a viewer will find terrifying, stomach-churning, and, maybe, refreshing.—*B.D.* (Angelika Film Center, Battery Park 11, Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Twin, and 34th Street Theatre.)

RUDE BOY

This 1980 quasi-documentary keyhole portrait of the Clash works better as a period piece about a volatile time than it ever did as a rock film—it's too long and erratic. Told from the point of view of a feckless, beer-riddled, apolitical roadie, Ray Grange, who supplements his government dole check by clerking in a porn shop, the movie plunges viewers into the sociological morass of an England that had long since ceased to swing. Sloganizing reactionaries and fumbling leftists face off in the streets, cops and courts hassle group members for shooting pigeons off a roof and hassle black youths for supposedly picking pockets, and Margaret Thatcher rises to power exploiting middle-class fears. Thanks to this setting, in the concert and recording-studio scenes, the Clash's aggressive, canny blend of reggae, punk, and roots rock goes down like a spiked tonic. The best number here, though, may be their cover of "I Fought the Law."—*M.S.* (BAM Rose Cinemas; Sept. 4.)

THE VILLAGE

M. Night Shyamalan has made a career out of devising films that manage to frighten and excite without ever quite coming alive. Given his obsession with the deceased, this may be construed as appropriate. Even by his standards, however, this new picture is dangerously dour. The setting is a hamlet in the American countryside, ringed by crackling woods and inhabited by a community so glum that its leader is played by William Hurt. The roles of his fellow-elders are taken by, among others, Sigourney Weaver and Brendan Gleeson, while the younger generation is represented by Joaquin Phoenix and Bryce Dallas Howard—the only live wire on the scene, and hence a considerable relief. The love between these two is the spark for mysterious occurrences, notably the invasion of the closed society by

DARYL HANNAH

The Painted Turtle

With a solar-powered home, a car that uses vegetable oil and an organic garden, it's clear Daryl Hannah is serious about the environment. "It's been a process. I started recycling, then took baby steps to live in harmony with nature." She encourages, "Shop locally and organically for food, cleaning products and pesticides." Daryl supports The Painted Turtle, which offers chronically ill children an outdoor, organic and recreational retreat with 24-hour medical care. Daryl can be seen in the independent film *Silver City* this fall.

For more information, go to www.ema-online.org and www.thepaintedturtle.com.

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CHRISTIAN SLATER

Children's Health Environmental Coalition (CHEC)

Christian Slater first thought about the future of the environment when his two children were born. Shopping only at supermarkets where he can buy organic food, Christian believes everyone can play a part in changing the world. "Every time my son picks up a piece of trash, he educates me about the importance of simple actions. If we all did two percent more, everything would change." Christian can be seen this fall in the horror film *Alone in the Dark.*

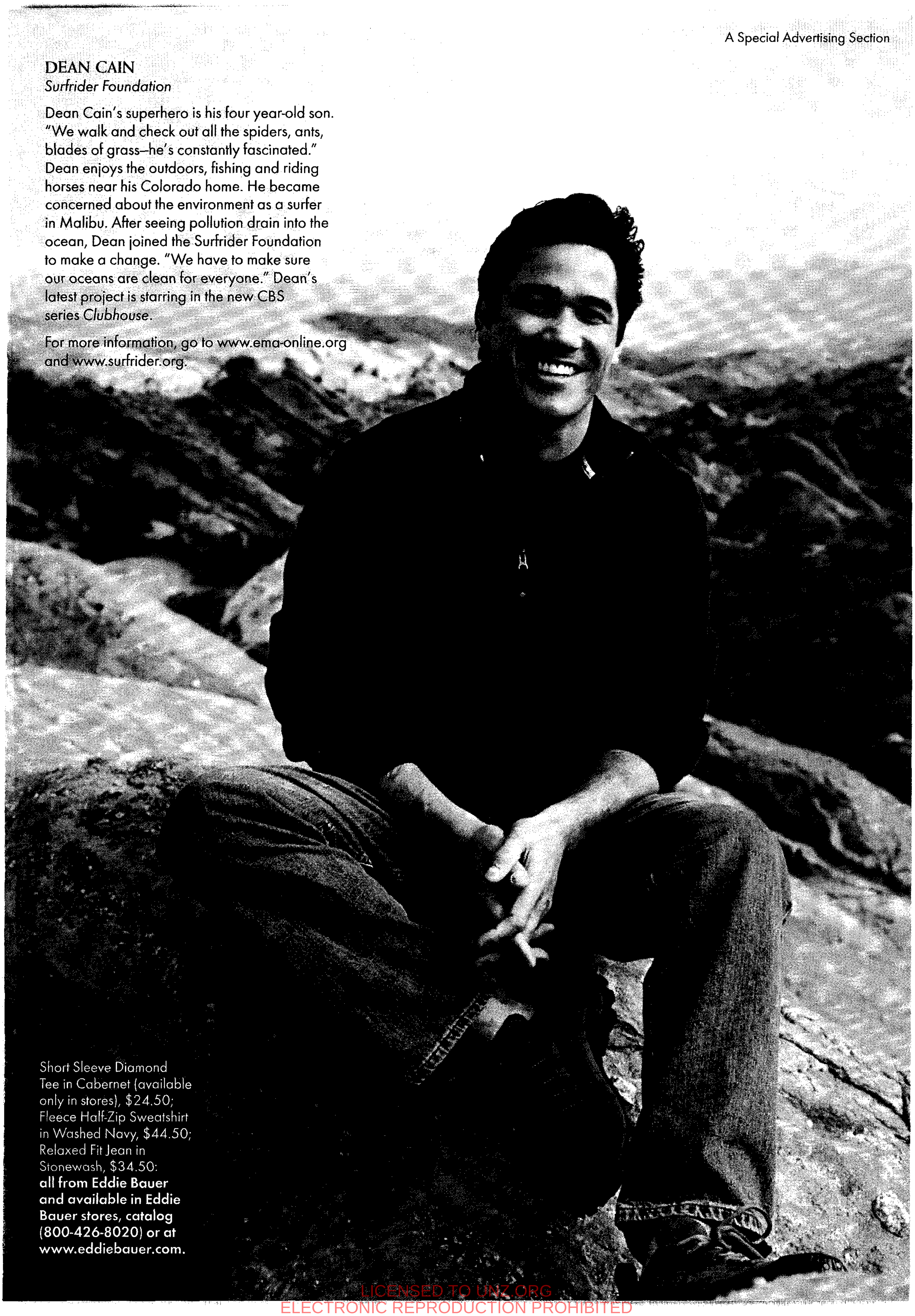
For more information, go to www.ema-online.org and www.checnet.org.

DEAN CAIN

Surfrider Foundation

Dean Cain's superhero is his four year-old son. "We walk and check out all the spiders, ants, blades of grass—he's constantly fascinated." Dean enjoys the outdoors, fishing and riding horses near his Colorado home. He became concerned about the environment as a surfer in Malibu. After seeing pollution drain into the ocean, Dean joined the Surfrider Foundation to make a change. "We have to make sure our oceans are clean for everyone." Dean's latest project is starring in the new CBS series *Clubhouse*.

For more information, go to www.ema-online.org and www.surfrider.org.



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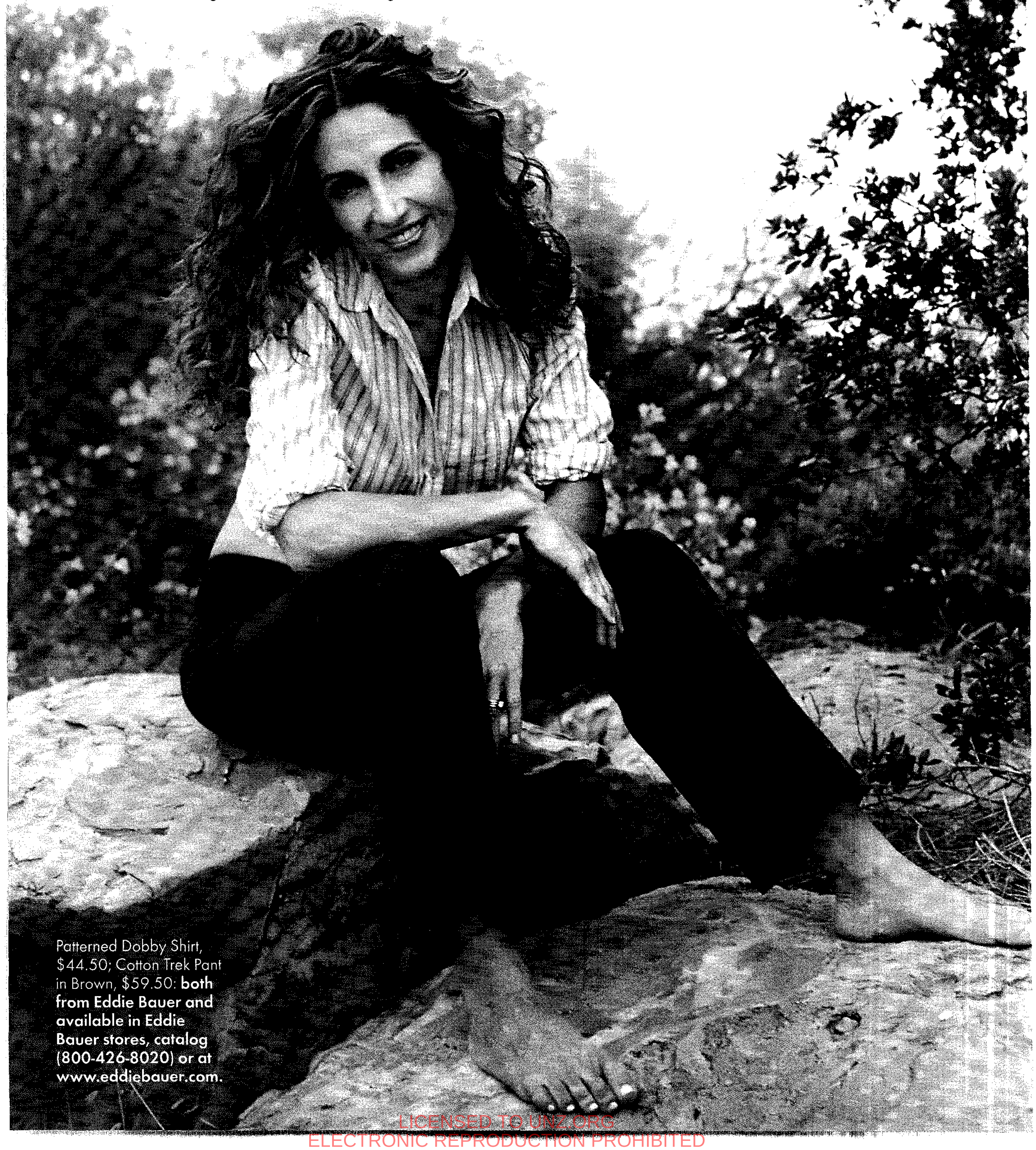
MELINA KANAKAREDES

Environmental Media Association (EMA)

"When my daughter and I take walks," beams proud mom Melina Kanakaredes, "she stops and smells every flower." The former star of *Providence* prefers cooking at home with her Greek family. "Not eating fast food with its plastic and paper wrappers helps the environment." Melina also carries her own bag to the supermarket and encourages choosing pesticide-free foods. She can currently be seen on the CBS drama *CSI: New York*.

For more information, go to www.ema-online.org.



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ROB LOWE

Children's Health Environmental Coalition (CHEC)

The environment is particularly important to Rob Lowe, whose son has asthma. Rob educates the public about children's health problems caused by toxic substances. "The environment is the one cause everyone has in common, regardless of political affiliation." This former star of *The West Wing* built his family a "green" home and encourages the use of non-toxic glue and non-lead based paints. Rob can be seen this fall in the new CBS drama *Dr. Vegas*.

For more information, go to www.ema-online.org and www.checnet.org.

Weathered Short Sleeve Pocket Tee, $19.50; Thermal Crewneck in Washed Navy, $29.50; Relaxed Fit Jean in Crosshatch, $34.50: **all from Eddie Bauer and available in Eddie Bauer stores, catalog (800-426-8020) or at www.eddiebauer.com.**

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When Stars Align

The Environmental Media Association (EMA) organizes the entertainment industry in a global effort to educate about environmental issues and inspire people into action. The EMA was created in 1989 as a non-profit organization to use television and film to influence environmental awareness among millions of people. By weaving messages in entertainment programming and utilizing celebrities as positive role models, the EMA has a profound effect on how the public receives environmental information. For more information about the EMA and its efforts, visit www.ema-online.org.

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EMA
Environmental Media Association

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a bevy of red-robed woodland beasts. As is Shyamalan's wont, there are twists, although they are so heavily signalled as to be drained of shock; what is surprising is that, even here, in the midst of a humorless conceit, the viewer can be stirred and dismayed; when a director is damned for repeating himself, it can be a sign that he has touched a nerve whose rawness refuses to fade.—*Anthony Lane* (8/23/04) (Battery Park 11, Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Orpheum VII, and 34th Street Theatre.)

WE DON'T LIVE HERE ANYMORE
In this extraordinary adaptation of two Andre Dubus novellas from the nineteen-seventies, Laura Dern is a woman married to a mediocre college English teacher (Mark Ruffalo) in New England. When her husband begins an affair with her best friend (Naomi Watts), she takes revenge, with her husband's guilty help, by sleeping with her best friend's husband (Peter Krause). The movie is so beautifully made, and so strong emotionally, that the potentially dreary material is actually thrilling. The director, John Curran, lets the squalling marital fights between Ruffalo and Dern swell and crest without unnecessary emphasis. The entire production is precise, vibrant, and, for all its turmoil, extremely moving. Michael Convertino did the music, and Maryse Alberti did the lovely cinematography, which builds a canopy of nature over the characters, season by season, and lets us know that, unhappy or not, they will survive. The screenplay is by Larry Gross.—*D.D.* (8/30/04) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Cinema 1, East 86th Street Cinemas, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, and Village Theatre VII.)

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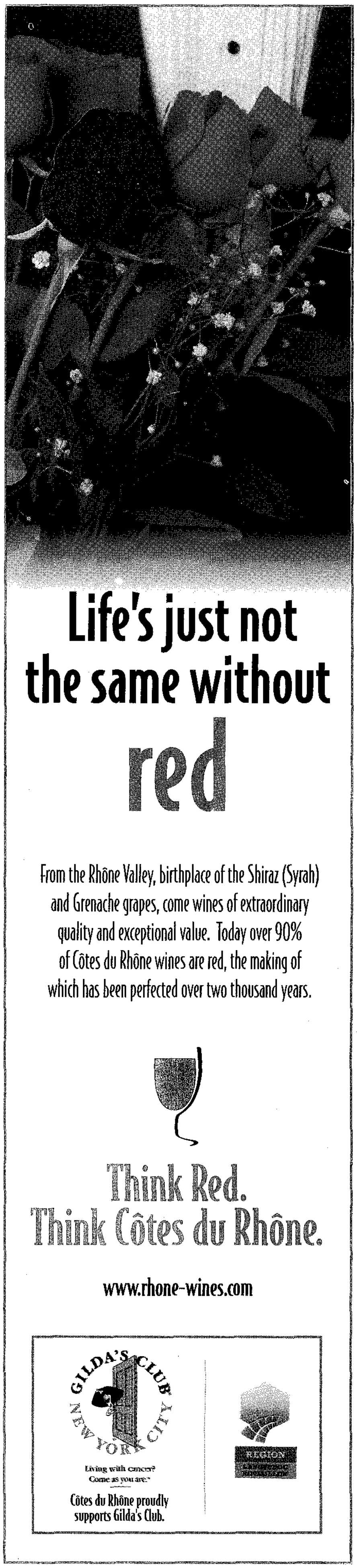
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Repertory nights. Sept. 3 at 7:30 and Sept. 4-5 at 6:30: "Last Tango in Paris" (1973, Bernardo Bertolucci). ♦ Through Sept. 26: A series of films about American politics. Sept. 4-5 at 2: "The Best Man" (†). ♦ Sept. 4-5 at 4: "Medium Cool" (†).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-777-3456)—Movies with innovative soundtracks, selected by the director Olivier Assayas. Sept. 2 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Gummo" (1997, Harmony Korine). ♦ Sept. 3 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Cold Water" (1994, Olivier Assayas). ♦ Sept. 4 at 3, 6, and 9: "Rude Boy" (†). ♦ Sept. 6 at 2, 5:30, and 9: "Casino" (1995, Martin Scorsese). ♦ Sept. 7 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Electra Glide in Blue" (1973, James William Guercio). ♦ Repertory favorites. Sept. 5 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:30: "Carnival Roots" (2003, Peter Chelkowski).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—Through Sept. 9: "They Came from Toho: Godzilla and the Kaiju Eiga." Sept. 1 at 1, 4:30, and 7:55: "Godzilla vs. Monster Zero" (1965, Ishiro Honda). ♦ Sept. 1 at 2:55, 6:20, and 9:45: "Godzilla, King of the Monsters!" (1956, Honda and Terry Morse). ♦ Sept. 2 at 1, 4:15, and 7:30: "Son of Godzilla" (1967, Jun Fukuda; in Japanese). ♦ Sept. 2 at 2:40, 5:55, and 9:10: "Terror of Mechagodzilla" (1975, Honda). ♦ Sept. 3-4 at 1, 4:30, and 8: "King Kong vs. Godzilla" (1962, Honda). ♦ Sept. 3-4 at 2:45, 6:15, and 9:45: "Ghidrah: The Three-Headed Monster" (1964, Honda). ♦ Sept. 5 at 2, 6, and 10 and Sept. 6 at 6 and 10: "Godzilla, Mothra, King Ghidorah" (2003, Shusuke Kaneko; in Japanese). ♦ Sept. 5-6 at 4 and 8: "Godzilla vs. Destoroyah" (1995, Takao Okawara). ♦ Sept. 6 at 2:30: "Rodan" (1956, Honda). ♦ Sept. 6 at 1: "Gigantis: The Fire Monster" (1955, Motoyoshi Oda). ♦ Sept. 7 at 1:10, 5:10, and 9:10: "Godzilla 2000" (1999, Okawara). ♦ Sept. 7 at 3:10 and 7:10: "Godzilla vs. Megaguirus" (2001, Masaaki Tezuka; in Japanese).

SUNSHINE CINEMA
143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—Midnight movies. Sept. 3-5: "The Goonies" (1985, Richard Donner).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—Through Sept. 16: "Cairo Tales: Discovering Salah Abou Seif and Recent Cinema from the Arab World." All films are in Arabic. Sept. 3 at 2 and Sept. 5 at 8:30: "A Thousand Months" (2003, Faouzi Bensaïdi). ♦ Sept. 3 at 4:30 and Sept. 5 at 6:30: "Rana's Wedding" (2002, Hany Abu-Assad). ♦ Sept. 3 at 6:15 and Sept. 4 at 2: "Viva Laldjerie" (2003, Nadir Moknèche). ♦ Sept. 3 at 8:30 and Sept. 5 at 3:45: "A Woman's Youth" (1956, Salah Abou Seif). ♦ Sept. 4 at 4:15 and Sept. 6 at 8:50: "Awakening" (2003, Mohamed Zineddaine). ♦ Sept. 4 at 6: "Women's Love" (2003, Khaled El Hagar). ♦ Sept. 4 at 8:15: "Satin Rouge" (2002, Raja Amari). ♦ Sept. 5 at 1:30: "An Algerian Dream" (2003, Jean-Pierre Lledo). ♦ Sept. 6 at 2 and 6:30: "I Am Free" (1958, Seif). ♦ Sept. 6 at 4:15: "The Closed Doors" (1999, Atef Hetata). ♦ Sept. 7 at 1 and 6:15: "Tough Guy" (1957, Seif). ♦ Sept. 7 at 3:40 and 8:45: "Cairo 30" (1966, Seif).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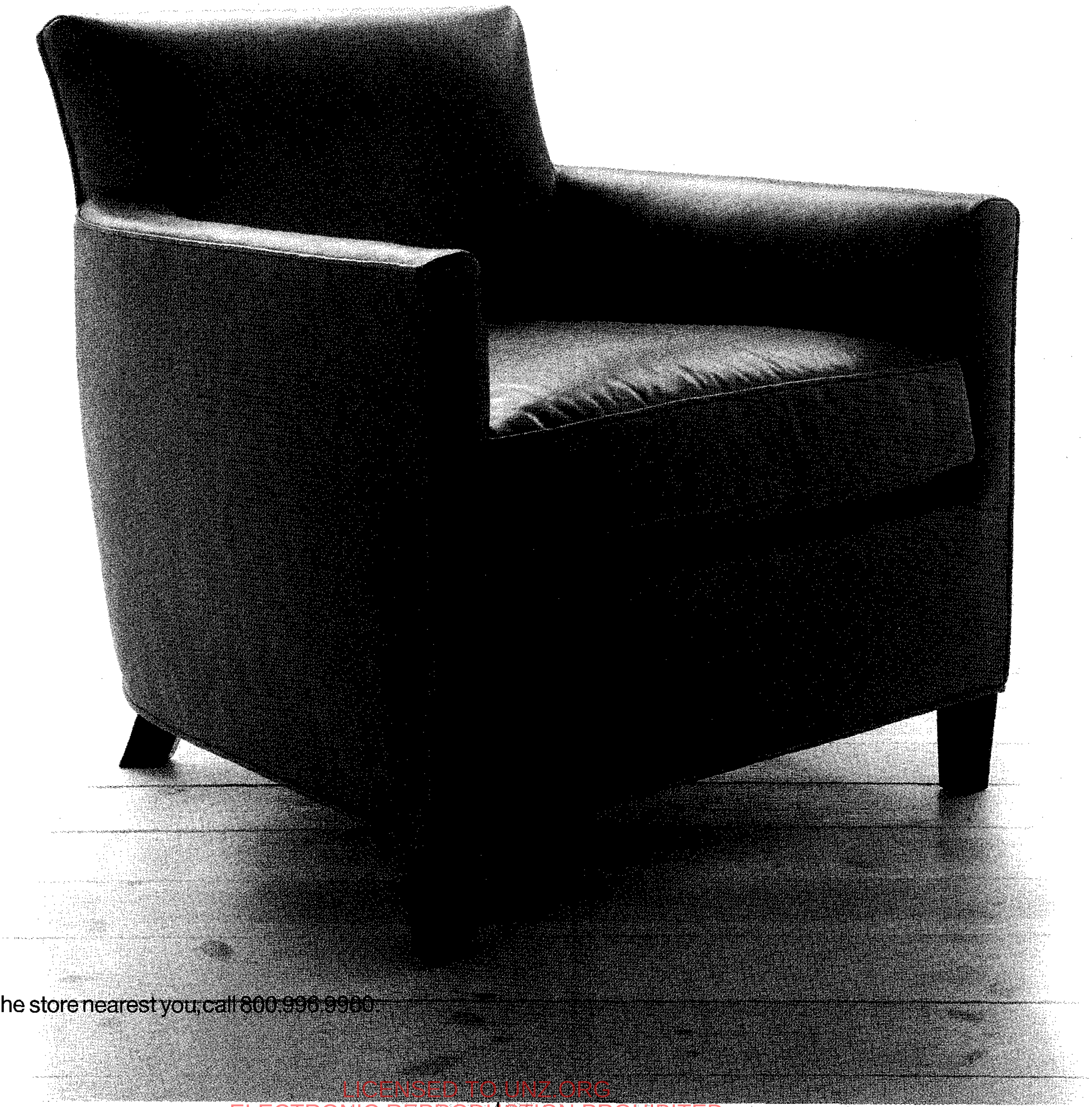

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THE
NEW YORKER

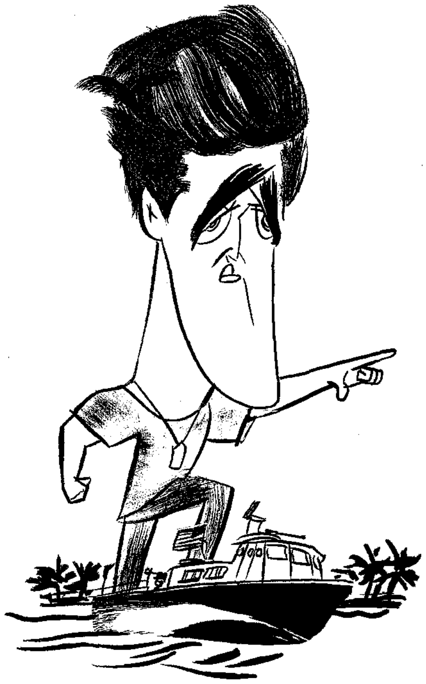
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
UNDER FIRE

The Republicans are here. We—we New Yorkers—hope they enjoy the amenities of our city. We hope they are treated politely by all of our fellow canyon dwellers, including those among us who are alarmed by the performance of the incumbent Administration during the past three and a half years—alarmed by its mania for shovelling cash to the very rich at the expense of families of middling means, its servility to polluters and fossil-fuel extractors, its reckless embrace of fiscal insolvency, its hostility to science, its political alliances with fanatic religious fundamentalisms of every stripe except Islamic (and of that stripe, too, when the subject is family planning or capital punishment), its partisan exploitation of our city's suffering after the attacks of September 11, 2001, its transubstantiation of the worldwide solidarity that followed those attacks into worldwide anti-Americanism, and its diversion of American blood, treasure, and expertise away from the pursuit of Al Qaeda to a bloody occupation of Iraq that appears to have done nothing to weaken Islamist terrorism and may have done more than a little to strengthen it. We sincerely hope that those who will inevitably take to the streets in order to register their objections to the above will conduct themselves courteously and will refrain from offensive or destructive behavior—not only because such behavior is ill-mannered but also because it would represent a huge gift to the political purpose that has brought our conventioneering guests to town. It's nice to make nice, but that would be overdoing it.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

Unfortunately, some of our guests chose to try the good will of their hosts (and of tens of millions more of their fellow-countrymen) by devoting the three weeks leading up to the Republican National Convention to an exercise in ugly and mendacious defamation. The campaign to blacken the honor of Senator John Kerry does not appear to be the direct work of Bush-Cheney '04, Inc. or the Republican National Committee but of an "independent" group styling itself Swift Boat Veterans for Truth. (A more truthful name, as John Kerry's fellow Vietnam veteran and former Senate colleague Bob Kerrey remarked angrily the other day, would be Republican Swift Boat Veterans Against Kerry.) The anti-Kerry veterans group and the official Bush campaign are advised by the same lawyer, Benjamin L. Ginsberg (or were until last Wednesday, when he abruptly resigned as national counsel to Bush-Cheney '04, Inc.); they enjoy the financial support of the same wealthy Texas Republicans, especially Bob Perry, a close friend and political associate of Karl Rove; and they are connected to each other and to the Republican Party by a web of operatives and consultants. Facts such as these do not in themselves demonstrate unlawful coördination between the Bush campaign and the veterans group, which is one of many groups known as "527s," in honor of the legal loophole under which they were created. They offer even less support, however, for the assertion of Marc Racicot, the chairman of Bush-Cheney '04, Inc., that "there is no connection of any kind whatsoever." Suffice it to say that if the provable ties between the Saddam Hussein regime and Al Qaeda had been a fraction as strong as the provable ties between the Bush campaign and the veterans group, the "coalition of the willing" would have been larger than it is.



Senator John McCain—whose rec-

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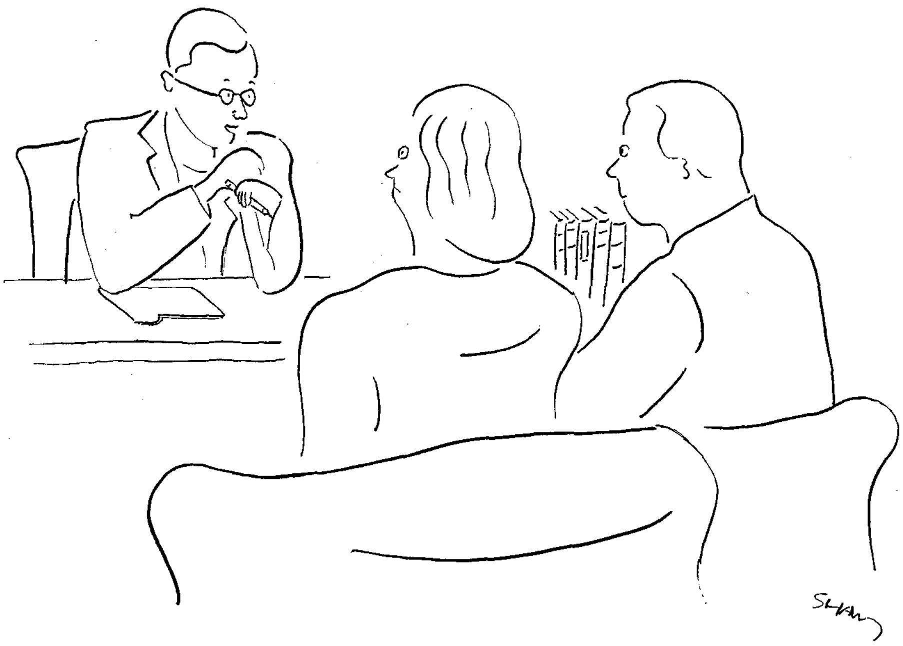


"The Feds have authorized me to leave your child behind."

• •

ord was subjected to similar smears four years ago by a similar veterans rump group—immediately called the anti-Kerry advertisements "dishonest and dishonorable" and said he hoped President Bush would denounce them, too. Asked last Monday why he had not done so, the President had this to say:

> I'm denouncing all the stuff being on TV of the 527s. That's what I've said. I said this kind of unregulated soft money is wrong for the process. And I asked Senator Kerry to join me in getting rid of all that kind of soft money, not only on TV, but used for other purposes, as well.

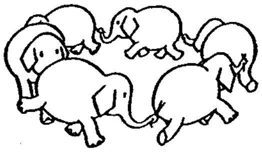
It doesn't get much feebler than that, does it? Perhaps the 527 loophole should be closed during the next round of campaign-finance reform, though Bush's call for getting rid of 527s right now is a bit self-serving, given that Kerry has to spread his seventy-five million dollars in federal campaign funds over three months while Bush gets to spread his over only two. So the Kerry camp's current (and probably temporary) advantage in "all that kind of soft money" is what keeps the playing field anywhere near even. But the problem with the anti-Kerry ads is substantive, not procedural. The problem is not that they are a subset of a category of activity that is "wrong for the process." The problem is that they are wrong.

One after another over the past few weeks, the plausibility of each accusation against Kerry has evaporated in the bright light of the existing record, the official documents of the Navy, the old and new testimony of those who were eyewitnesses to his valor, and the manifold prevarications of his accusers. About the only charge still arguably in legitimate contention involves whether, at Christmastime in 1968, he was a few thousand yards on one side or the other of the border between Cambodia and South Vietnam. Nevertheless, the campaign of calumny has succeeded in changing the polls. Those conducting it hope it will determine the outcome of the election. But it cannot change the facts—or, to use his accusers' word, the truth. The truth is that Kerry volunteered for Naval service; that he served as commander of a Swift Boat patrolling the enemy-infested Mekong Delta, duty that was among the most dangerous of the war (some seventy-five per cent of the men performing it were killed or wounded, compared with fourteen per cent of American military personnel in the war zone as a whole); that he was awarded five medals, including the Silver Star; that he fought for, risked his life for, and killed for his comrades and his country. And the truth is that none of these things are true of George W. Bush. As near as one can determine, Bush, having secured a spot in the Texas Air National Guard, spent Christmas of 1968 on the East Coast—that is, about fourteen million yards from the Vietnam-Cambodia border.

Kerry has been faulted for not having responded more quickly and forcefully to the attacks on his honor. His campaign miscalculated in assuming that a direct response would elevate charges which, left alone, would sink under the weight of their own falsity; instead, talk radio and cable television amplified them until they drowned out everything else. His initial reticence was understandable on a human level. The Republican Swift Boat Veterans Against Kerry, in their TV ads and in a quickie book entitled "Unfit for Command," accuse Kerry of being a liar, a coward, a malingerer, a criminal, and a traitor. When a serviceman has gone through what Kerry went through, to answer such base accusations is itself demeaning. That was McCain's experience, and Max Cleland's. But the sooner Kerry recognizes what kind of fight he is in today, and against what kind of enemy (the word is not too strong), the better.

—Hendrik Hertzberg

THE BIG SHOW SCOOPS



The news cycle is a tricky matter these days, what with cable TV and the Internet, but in the buildup to the Convention a new complication materialized: clairvoyance. Not content with the traditional sequence of choreographed tips and leaks, some of the participants in the political game sought to surmount the limitations of time and space. Suddenly, everybody seemed to know about things before they had happened.

For example, in the new issue of *Harper's*, which came out two weeks ago, Lewis Lapham, the editor, described the Convention as though it were already over: "The speeches in Madison Square Garden affirmed the great truths now routinely preached from the pulpits of Fox News and the *Wall Street Journal*—government the problem, not the solution; the social

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KIRA, ASSISTANT DESIGNER, 2 YEARS

20 years of Simplicity

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contract a dead letter; the free market the answer to every maiden's prayer—and while listening to the hollow rattle of the rhetorical brass and tin, I remembered the question that Hofstadter didn't stay to answer. . . ." At least one reader was moved to write the magazine in mock admiration of Lapham's "ability to travel in time," while others posted less amiable remarks on assorted blogs, comparing Lapham to Jayson Blair, Stephen Glass, and other fabulists. (Lapham responded on the magazine's Web site, admitting that he'd made a serious mistake—of verb tense and "poetic license"—for which he was sorry.)

Meanwhile, John Kerry passed through town last week to deliver a speech at the Cooper Union. An Associated Press account of this visit crossed the wires hours before Kerry had even arrived. Though it may be customary for a campaign to release the text of a speech in advance, it is rare, even for politicians, to appear without first showing up. At any rate, Kerry, too, seemed to have glimpsed the future. In his speech, he said of the Republicans, "They are going to say that we've turned the corner; that the job is getting done. They are even going to claim, as they already have, that this is the best economy of our lifetimes." (The *Times'* report, published the next day, improved on the A.P. scoop by noting that the speech lasted thirty-one minutes.)

President Bush's acceptance speech this Thursday will soon be old news—perhaps even before he delivers it, thanks (one may predict) to the Drudge Report, which broke the embargo on Kerry's speech at the Democratic National Convention. "We can already predict eighty-five per cent of what's in there," William Kristol, the editor of the *Weekly Standard*, said last Wednesday. "We can probably get it almost down to the phrase, in some cases, in terms of what Bush is going to say." (Some words come to mind: more secure America, sanctity of marriage, Iraqi soccer team.)

For an analogy, Kristol chose basketball: "You and I could, with ninety-nine-per-cent accuracy, predict that a typical game is going to be somewhere in the range of each team getting between sixty-five and eighty-five points, and we could predict within some pretty good range who's going to be the high scorer," he said. "But it still wouldn't be so easy to predict who was going to win and what three plays were going to be significant at the end."

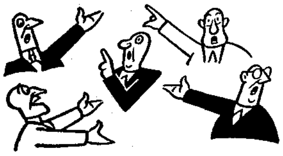
There is a case to be made, though, that the winner has, in a sense, already been determined and that traditional notions of time and sequence may not apply. This would be Einstein's case, as Michio Kaku, a professor of theoretical physics at CUNY, explained: "Einstein had this famous quote: 'For us believing physicists, the separation between past, present, and future is only an illusion, although a convincing one.' " He went on, "Most people approach space and time as though they're in an arena, in this case Madison Square Garden, where events play out on the floor and stage in front of you. We physicists realize space is curved, and that, once you approach the speed of light, time becomes subjective. Everyone now is linked by the Internet, which moves at near the speed of light, so the separation of past, present, and future political events defies common sense.

"On top of that, Einstein was a determinist—the outcome of everything is already knowable," Kaku continued. "The wrinkle is quantum theory. We now know that God plays dice, which causes uncertainty. God throws a monkey wrench in the best-laid plans of Republicans and Democrats."

Or, as Kristol said, "I think Bush's speech will be a not unimportant part of the dynamic of the election, with the caveat that it's always hard to predict what's going to be important."

—*Ben McGrath*

DEPT. OF IMPERSONATION REPORTING FOR DUTY



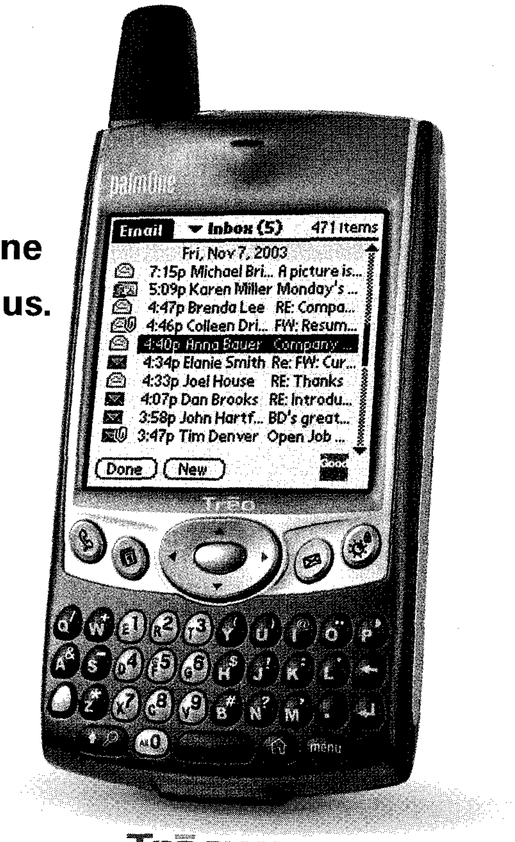
Every election year, Jim Morris hits the trail as a Presidential hopeful—or two, or three. Morris, a rangy forty-seven-year-old from Massachusetts, is arguably the country's leading political impressionist. He came to notice during the 1980 campaign, with his twinkly-eyed Ronald Reagan, and later provided the voices of all the political characters on the "Saturday Night Live" cartoon "The X-Presidents." One morning recently, Morris was sitting on a couch in a friend's Manhattan apartment, preparing his John Kerry impression for "Politics as Usual," a show he's bringing to New York this fall. On a coffee table lay a collage of photographs of Kerry in a variety of attitudes: the finger-waving sage, the beach-walking poet, the Harley-straddling dude. A tape of Kerry speeches was playing on a nearby television, and Morris watched closely as a young, shaggy-haired Kerry chatted with Dick Cavett about Vietnam. "He's so Kennedy-conscious there, so affected and lockjawed," Morris said. "His 'past' and 'asked' sound totally different now."

Morris had also made an audio loop of such signature Kerry phrases as "I say to you," "I'll tell ya, folks," and "We believe," and he'd tweaked the sound on his computer, often slowing the words down, until they resembled whale songs. Somehow, this helps. Morris buried his head in his hands, then spread his fingers cautiously and bellowed, "Whee believe . . . whee believe. . . ." The "whee" was appropriately hoarse and solemn, as if a grieving adult were accompanying a child down a slide. "Kerry is like Lenny in 'Of Mice and Men,' " Morris said. "He's too big; he can't handle words without crushing them."

Morris went and stood before a full-length mirror. "He's got this wonderful, goofy smile, but I can't get it unless I get into the character, and I'm not there yet. John Edwards is easy, because he's so emphatic, but Kerry is hard: he's so nuanced." He stiffened his shoulders and dropped his jaw low, then lower still. "He looks like Uncle Sam," he said, staring at himself. "Uncle Sam, on stilts, at the county fair."

Morris often catches Presidents in their own acts of mimicry. "What I pride myself on is becoming a character's id, making available all the discarded and covered-up stuff from his past, and that's why I dislike doing Bush," he said. "It just feels too easy to do this cartoon, so much of which—the denim shirts, the brush-clearing, the shrug—Bush borrowed from Reagan." He squinted. " 'I uh-preciate it. Henh. We're takin' care of it.' I saw Bush as a mix of Alfred E. Newman and Rick Moranis, who had that snarky, smirky 'Henh, henh, henh' thing going. But there's a bit of Bush's father in there as well." Morris had been thrusting the right side of his jaw out; now he parked his tongue there, and became George H. W. Bush. "Jimmy Carter did that sort of thing, too: when he got a crowd's adulation, he curled his tongue under his lower lip. You can see them

Suddenly the idea of email on a cell phone seems obvious.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5:09p Karen Miller Monday's ...
4:47p Brenda Lee RE: Compa...
4:46p Colleen Dri... FW: Resum...
4:40p Anna Bauer Company ...
4:34p Elanie Smith Re: FW: Cur...
4:33p Joel House RE: Thanks
4:07p Dan Brooks RE: Introdu...
3:58p John Hartf... BD's great...
3:47p Tim Denver Open Job ...
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doing that as kids, as little bashful kids."

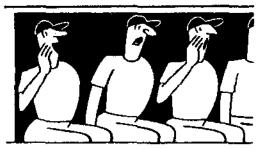
That night, Morris performed a short set at Stand-Up NY, on West Seventy-eighth Street. The audience was young and noisy, so he began with his impressions of Richard Nixon having sex and Dan Rather on Viagra. Then Morris announced that he was going to unveil his John Kerry for the first time. "John Kerry is very difficult to do," he said. "I'm still working on the face, so be kind. It's a mix of Herman Munster"—he went all stiff and bolt-necked, and got a big laugh. Then he boomed "Whee believe" a few times, drawing appreciative chuckles. And then he did a dead-on youthful Kerry: "How can you osk a man to be the lost man to die in Fyet-nom?" Total silence. Morris won the crowd back by doing John Edwards as a bulgy-eyed Barney Fife: "Here's whut *eye* know, here's whut *eye* know!"

Afterward, on the street, Morris said, "I was happy with their response to the Kerry face, at least. It's coming together. At the moment, I see John Kerry as two parts Herman Munster and one part Bill Walton—his build and facial structure and the cavities in his head, the nasal stuffiness. Then, there's a bit of Hugh Grant in his smile; some Robert Stack raspiness in the voice; some Jim Nabors in the shoulders and face; some Bea Arthur in the face; and a hint of that Indian who cried from the highway about the litter. Oh, and a little bit of my dog, Tex." He gave a dignified woof.

—*Tad Friend*

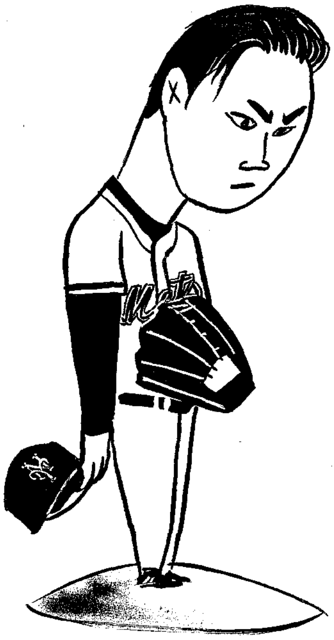
ON THE MOUND

BITTERNESS



On a gray afternoon of what would, for the time being, at least, prove to be his last weekend with the Mets, Jae Weong Seo, a pitcher once touted as a prospect blessed with vast possibilities, paused to chat about the eternal struggle against pain and disappointment. "Sometimes I wish life was easy and there were no struggles," he said. "But then, without them, life would not be that fun to live."

It is unusual to hear such talk from major-league ballplayers, who tend to think in terms of the present—a game, an at-bat, a pitch at a time. Seo, however, is Korean, and he has inherited a condition so particular that Koreans have a name for it: *han*. Loosely translated, *han* means "irresolvable bitterness." *Han* is not a static emotion. It often manifests itself in a strong incentive to show the world that you've been shortchanged. Although *han* can, in theory, go away, it will not do so incrementally. Think of clouds parting suddenly, a burst of blinding light. Koreans endure *han* collectively—as inhabitants of a small country or, rather, two countries, stuck between powerful neighbors, China and Japan, who have seldom been kind—and individually. "We Koreans feel *han*," Seo said. "It's the struggle within ourselves, in good times and in bad times."



Jae Weong Seo

Seo, who is twenty-seven, first came to the Mets' attention in 1997, when, as an undergraduate at Inha University, in the port city of Inchon, he pitched well against an American college all-star team. The Mets signed him later that year. Elbow surgery cost him most of the 1999 season, however, and all of 2000. There followed a lonely, *han*-sustaining trek through the minor leagues: he had barely enough English to talk to his teammates and a palate that did not take to Western cuisine. Still, he made the big club in 2003, and pitched so effectively that by spring the Mets and Seo assumed that he would be their fourth starter.

It has been a sour season, for both Seo and the Mets. Seo pitched dreadfully in spring training, and was remanded to the minors. "I knew I had a struggle when I found out that I wouldn't make the team," he said. "I felt in a really dark area, and I didn't know how to get out of it." It led, inevitably, to *han*. "The disappointment," he said. "I felt every year, other than this year, that I wasn't making the big club. I thought this year there was very little chance of my experiencing this feeling again."

He was soon back with the Mets, however, because his replacement in the rotation injured a hamstring. Seo, who is tall and is thick across the shoulders and chest, pitched well on some occasions and poorly on others.

As it happens, Seo grew up in the southern city of Kwangju, where the collective sense of *han* is at its most acute. In 1980, when Seo was three, the South Korean Army crushed an antigovernment uprising there by killing a hundred and ninety-one protesters—the officials said—though in the view of most observers it was hundreds more.

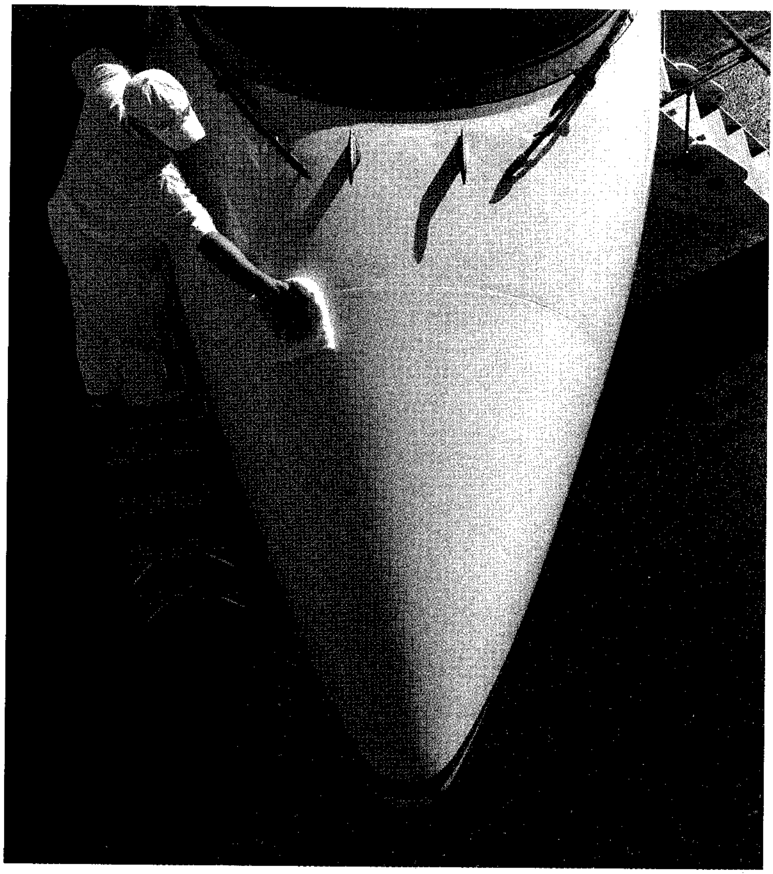
"It was definitely in our coaches, managers, and teachers," Seo said. " 'Think about what your parents have gone through.' Those subtle messages made us stronger."

Seo's English has improved, but for complex matters he still relies on an interpreter. He talked about the off-season, when he will return to Korea and marry his fiancée, and, vaguely, about a future with children and a relative sense of ease. Perhaps, he added, he will even be able to look back on this moment in his career, his struggle to prove his worth, and see the advantage that *han* accorded him. "Years from now," he said, "I may think that being Korean helped."

A few days later, he pitched against Montreal, the weakest team in the division. He started well and then, in the fourth, lost his way. He was missing the strike zone, and as he began walking batters the look on his face was one of a man who wished to be someplace else. After the game, the Mets traded for two new starters, Kris Benson and Victor Zambrano, and sent Seo back to the minor leagues, to their affiliate in Norfolk, Virginia. Since then, the Mets have lost the majority of their games, and have fallen out of the running for a playoff spot. A familiar feeling has come over their fans—a Flushing Meadows kind of *han*.

—*Michael Shapiro*

LEAVING PERFECTIONISTS SPEECHLESS SINCE 1986.



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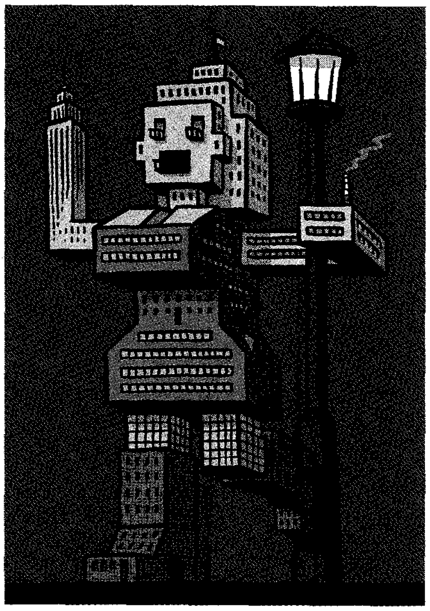
THE FINANCIAL PAGE
COME ONE, COME ALL

Why here? This thought must have occurred to the citizens of Boston, Athens, and New York this summer as they saw their cities converted, at great expense, into heavily garrisoned holiday camps for hordes of strangers. Hometown promoters of political conventions and the Olympics invariably argue that such mass visitations are an economic boon. The Bloomberg administration predicted that this week's Republican Convention would create thousands of jobs and more than two hundred and fifty million dollars in extra revenue; the mayor of Boston said that the Democrats would generate a hundred and fifty million dollars in extra business (he overestimated by about a hundred and forty million). But by now it's well established that these mega-events, as economists call them, rarely live up to expectations. They bring in some visitors but scare off others. (Because the Republicans are in town this week, the MTV Video Music Awards were moved to Miami.) Post-September 11th security requirements drain treasuries. Locals skip town, and productivity plummets. As a member of the Los Angeles Convention and Visitors Bureau said, after hosting the Democrats in 2000, "On a dollar-for-dollar basis, you'd be better off with a national gastroenterologists' convention."

Still, city planners and Chamber of Commerce types have another rationale for hosting mega-events: you can't beat the publicity. Travel and tourism have become crucial to the economic health of many American cities, where high-wage, low-skilled jobs have disappeared. Tourism is a curious kind of export business—your customers are in other cities and countries, but, instead of shipping the product to them, you get them to come to you. So political conventions are pitched as advertisements for cosmopolitanism and comfort—as weeklong exercises in building a city's brand name.

Cities want the publicity because they need the customers. In the last fifteen years, city planners have been on a construction spree, erecting huge new convention centers, hotels, and exhibition halls. Chicago added a million square feet. Omaha, Baton Rouge, Hartford, and Fort Wayne got in the game. Boston blew eight hundred and fifty million dollars on a gorgeous new palace in South Boston, which sat unused last month as the Democrats gathered in the Fleet Center instead. Cities embraced a version of Say's Law—supply generates its own demand. They assumed that if they built the convention space the conventioneers would come. Well, the boom didn't happen. In the late nineties, Indianapolis added a hundred thousand square feet of convention space and overhauled its domed stadium, but, between 1996 and 2002, the number of conventioneers in town fell by almost twenty-five per cent. The convention business is still big, but the exhibition-hall glut has made it harder for cities to make money, as they cut prices to tempt guests.


CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

Every city likes to think that it's special, and it's true that Atlanta is distinct from St. Paul. But, as far as business travellers are concerned, most cities seem equally charming or dismal, which means, unfortunately, that those cities are selling basically the same product: a giant empty space in a pleasant American burg. The convention business now looks a bit like the old steel and aluminum industries: too many players offering too much of the same stuff. This is known as "commodity hell." The logical solution is for the industry to shrink, but that's difficult for cities to do. LTV and Republic Steel can merge; Indianapolis and Louisville cannot.

That's why cities are so desperate to snag mega-events; they hope to establish themselves as great hosts, in the eyes of the world—to brand their way out of commodity hell. In most cases, unfortunately, the boost doesn't last: can you remember where the 1996 Republican Convention was, or the 1992 Winter Olympics? And, if you can, are you eager to go there? Nor is the publicity always positive. In Los Angeles four years ago, the protesters got more attention than the city did, while the main impression viewers got of Boston this summer was that its streets look nice when they're empty.

The cities that have really succeeded in making a profit off visitors—like Las Vegas and Orlando—didn't do so by building acres of convention-hall space, or by putting on mega-events. Instead, they started with what advertisers used to call a unique selling proposition. They had something—casinos, Disney World—worth coming to see. Las Vegas is now host to more conventions than any other city in America. Either you've got it or you don't.

So where does this leave New York? It's more like Vegas than like Indianapolis—it has a unique selling proposition. It gets plenty of exposure on TV already. How will closeups of delegates, senators, and anarchists inspire anyone to consider it anew? The city should skip the mega-events and go after the humdrum stuff instead, the International Lawn, Garden & Power Equipment Expo or the World Shoe Association Shoe Show. They're less glamorous but more profitable, and a lot less trouble. Most of these jamborees are now choosing other towns, because New York has forgone the convention-hall craze; it now ranks eighteenth in the country in convention space. The Jacob K. Javits Convention Center, which seemed huge when it was built, in the mid-eighties, is a throwback, a mere minivan in an S.U.V. world. Everyone seems to agree that it needs to be expanded, but plans to do so have been held up by the city's scheme to host the Olympics in 2012. Big dreams are getting in the way of good sense. Forget the Games; bring on the gastroenterologists.

—*James Surowiecki*

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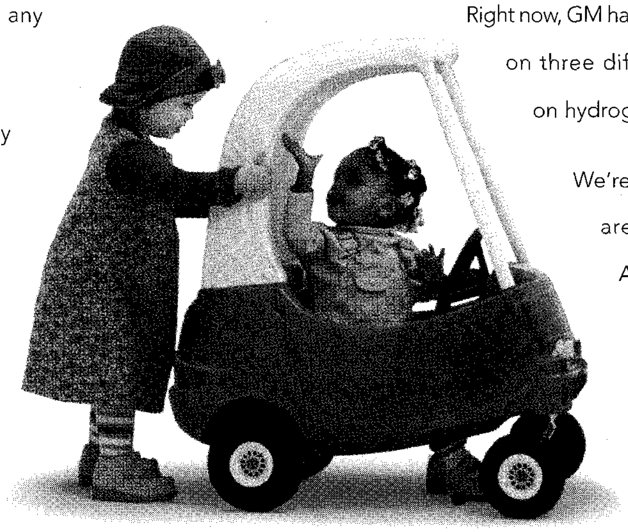

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THE POLITICAL SCENE

TAX CODE

Tax cuts were just the beginning: the President is signalling a far more radical agenda.

BY JOHN CASSIDY

A few weeks ago, George W. Bush crossed the Potomac to a community college in Annandale, Virginia, where he hosted an "Ask President Bush" town-hall-style meeting and took up a favorite campaign theme, saying that one of the things that separated him from his opponent was his intention to create a "culture of ownership." The same day, the Bush-Cheney campaign released a new television ad that shows pictures of houses, workers, and businesses as the President announces, "One of the most important parts of a reform agenda is to encourage people to own something. Own their own home, own their own business, own their own health-care plan, or own a piece of their retirement. Because I understand if you own something, you have a vital stake in the future of America."

The President's ownership initiative hasn't featured prominently in the media coverage of the campaign, which, strictly from a news perspective, is understandable: he hasn't announced many specific proposals to back up his talk. But in downplaying the Bush Administration's economic agenda the media is missing one of the biggest domestic stories of the 2004 campaign. When the President pledges to create an "era of ownership," he is not talking merely about encouraging people to buy their own homes and start small businesses. To conservative Republicans who understand his coded language, he is also talking about extending and expanding the tax cuts he introduced in his first term; he is talking about allowing wealthy Americans to shelter much of their income from the I.R.S.; about using the tax code to curtail the government's role in health care and retirement saving; and, ultimately, about a vision that has entranced but eluded conservatives for decades: the abolition of the graduated income tax and its replacement with a levy that is simpler, flatter, and more favorable to rich people.

The days of the Eisenhower balanced-budget Republicans are over.

TOM BACHTELL

Work on achieving this ambitious program began with the tax cuts that Congress passed in 2001, 2002, and 2003, but the conservative economists who advise Bush and the right-wing institutes that support him have more in mind than consolidating their gains. Despite a gaping budget deficit, they are pressing the President to continue down a route that will reverse almost a century of American history. Since the personal income tax was introduced, in 1913, it has been based on two principles: the burden of taxation is distributed according to the ability to pay; and capital and labor carry their fair share. The Bush Administration appears set on undermining both of these principles.

It is easy to forget that when George W. Bush made his bid for the Presidency many conservatives initially opposed him. Their candidate in the 2000 Republican primaries was Steve Forbes, the publishing heir, who had endorsed an annual flat tax of seventeen per cent on all income above thirteen thousand dollars. This proposal, a descendant of a tax plan that two conservative economists from Stanford, Robert Hall and Alvin Rabushka, had devised in the nineteen-eighties, was based on supply-side economics: flattening tax rates and simplifying the tax code would encourage people to work harder and save more, which would boost economic growth. Critics of Forbes's proposal pointed out that the link between taxes and growth is tenuous, but it proved popular with Republican activists, and Bush, whose father had enraged conservatives by reneging on his "no new taxes" pledge, came under pressure to match it.

In December, 1999, Bush said he would cut federal taxes by $1.6 trillion over ten years if elected. This plan, which was enacted into law as the Economic Growth and Tax Relief Reconciliation Act of 2001, wasn't a flat tax, but it was big and bold enough to establish Bush's credentials as a fiscal conservative.

The timing of the legislation proved lucky. By the summer of 2001, the stock-market bubble had burst; the economy had fallen into recession and it badly needed a boost. But, after the terrorist attacks on 9/11, there were widespread worries that, despite the fiscal stimulus and low interest rates, the economy wouldn't recover anytime soon. In response, the Bush Administration introduced the Job Creation and Worker Assistance Act of 2002, which extended unemployment benefits and provided businesses with temporary tax breaks if they invested in plant and equipment. The economy rebounded in the second half of 2002, but then suffered a relapse, at which point Congress, at the urging of the White House, passed the Job and Growth Tax Relief Reconciliation Act of 2003, which accelerated and expanded the tax cuts contained in the 2001 law.

Taken together, Bush's tax cuts were even bigger than the ones Ronald Reagan introduced in his first term. In 1981, Reagan slashed income-tax rates by about a quarter, claiming that the government's revenues would actually rise as the tax cuts unleashed the economy's potential. This claim, which Arthur Laffer, one of the originators of supply-side economics, formalized in his famous "Laffer curve," turned out to be wildly optimistic, and the budget deficit soared. In the ensuing years, a panicked Congress reversed some of Reagan's tax cuts, and the White House quietly accepted the rollbacks, which increased tax revenues. When the International Monetary Fund recently compared Bush's fiscal record with Reagan's, it concluded that "the revenue effect of the Reagan tax cuts was considerably smaller than in the current period."

According to the White House, in fiscal 2004 the three Bush tax cuts will cost the United States Treasury about $241 billion in revenues, which is about two per cent of the gross domestic product. (The Congressional Budget Office, which is nonpartisan, puts the 2004 cost of the tax cuts at closer to three hundred billion dollars.) The lost revenue has wreaked havoc with the budget. In 1999, the federal government had a surplus of $125.6 billion; this year, according to the latest official forecast, it will have a deficit of about $450 billion. The 2001 recession and the jump in spending on defense and homeland security since 9/11 are responsible for some of this reversal, but even the Bush Administration concedes that tax cuts caused about a third of it.

Still, Bush's advisers like to portray him as a pragmatic businessman who has little time for political agendas and economic ideology. "The President is a problem-solver," R. Glenn Hubbard, the dean of Columbia Business School, who was the chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers from 2001 to 2003, told me. "It's a mistake to think of him as being on an academic mission for tax reform, as much as trying to solve real and practical problems in the tax code." However, conservative economists outside the Administration have a different view of the past four years. "Bush doesn't talk the language of the supply-siders," said Stephen Moore, the president of the Club for Growth, a Washington-based lobbying group that pushes for lower taxes. "He doesn't sound like Arthur Laffer. He doesn't talk about incentives. That's been a little frustrating. But is Bush a supply-sider in terms of policy? No question about it. He has really bought into that philosophy."

Bush's tax cuts weren't just bigger than Reagan's: they were more strategic. During the nineteen-nineties, conservative Republicans on Capitol Hill broke with the deficit hawks in their party and rallied behind former Congressman Dick Armey's 1994 proposal for a flat tax (which was similar to the one Steve Forbes campaigned for in 1996 and 2000). Partly because the economy was gaining strength after Bill Clinton's 1993 tax increases, which helped balance the budget, and partly because studies showed that a flat tax would benefit the wealthy, who would see their tax rates slashed, the Republican tax cutters failed to make much progress. After George W. Bush was elected, they changed tactics. Instead of following the Reagan model and pushing for a single revolutionary reform, they promoted a series of smaller changes that would ultimately lead in the same direction. "That's the hidden story of what is going on under Bush," Stephen Moore said. "People like me have been advocating a flat tax for a decade. I helped Dick Armey put together his flat-tax proposal. Nobody could get it done politically. What

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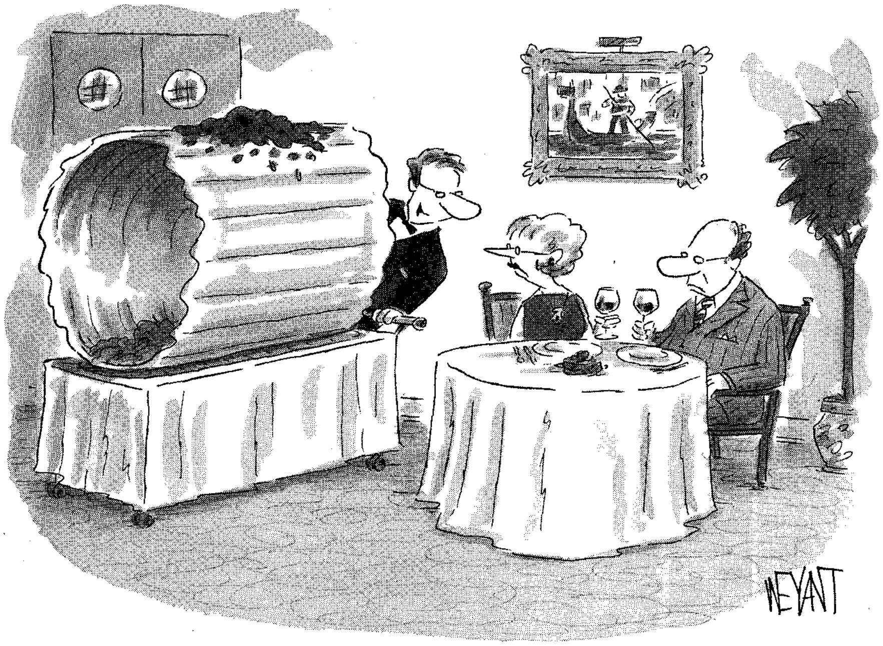
Bush has done, in a hidden way, is move us in baby steps toward the flat tax."

The 2001 tax reform reduced the top rate of income tax from 39.6 per cent to 38.6 per cent, the second rate from 36 per cent to 35 per cent, the third rate from 31 per cent to 30 per cent, and the fourth rate from 28 per cent to 27 per cent, with more cuts scheduled for later years. It also introduced a new lower rate of ten per cent on the first six thousand dollars of taxable income, increased the child tax credit, reduced the tax penalty paid by married couples who file jointly, and phased out the estate tax.

Conservatives supported this reform package, but from their perspective it had a big shortcoming: the only part of it that dealt with taxes on savings was the phasing out of the estate tax, and even that wasn't scheduled to be completed until 2010. Flat-tax enthusiasts argue that saving and investment is the key to economic growth, and they propose that most of the income generated from savings—interest payments from bank accounts and bonds, dividend payouts from stocks, and capital gains from the sale of any asset—should be tax exempt.

In 2002, Ernest Christian, a Republican tax lawyer, circulated a plan to create a flat tax in what he termed "five easy pieces." Other conservatives developed Christian's plan. Grover Norquist, the president of the lobbying group Americans for Tax Reform, set up congressional caucuses to support five specific changes: eliminating the estate tax; ending the taxation of capital gains; making all income generated from savings tax free; letting businesses write off their investments in a single year rather than depreciating them over a long period; and abolishing the Alternative Minimum Tax, which originated in a 1969 congressional act to counter tax avoidance by the rich, who sometimes had so many deductions that they ended up paying no tax. "People don't trust you to do twenty-seven things at once and have it come out right," Norquist, who has close ties to Karl Rove, Bush's political strategist, told me. "Why would you ask people to approve twenty major changes to the tax code at once, which irritate as many people as they please, as opposed to a series of five or six distinct tax cuts, each of which can be explained and sold to a constituency?"

The tax reforms of 2002 and 2003 contained significant elements of the Christian-Norquist program. The 2002 law allowed businesses to write off half of their investments immediately, through 2004, a provision that saved firms billions of dollars. The 2003 law sharply reduced taxes on dividends and capital gains, setting their maximum rates at fifteen per cent. William Beach, an economist at the conservative Heritage Foundation, later described the 2003 tax bill as "one of the greatest supply-side changes to tax law in U.S. history."

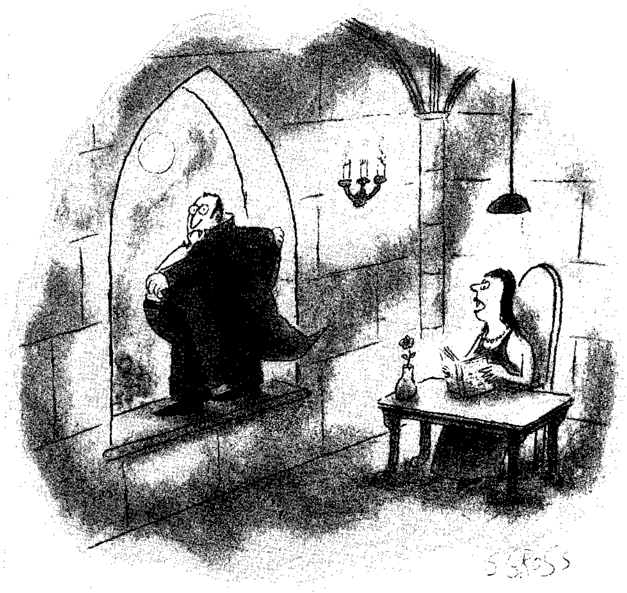


"Who ordered the megatelli?"

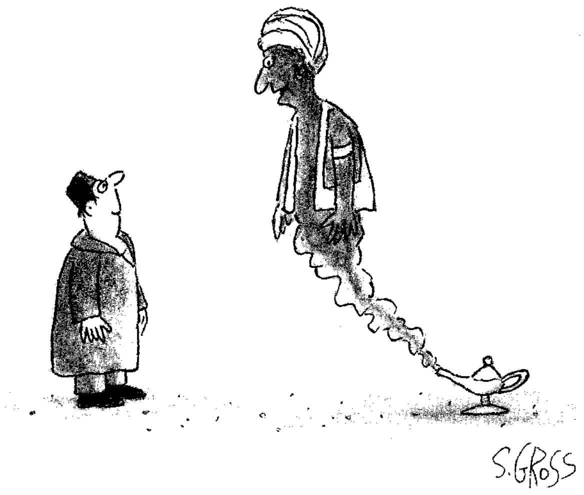
Also in 2003, the Administration proposed two new savings vehicles—Retirement Savings Accounts and Lifetime Savings Accounts—which would have replaced I.R.A.s and allowed many wealthy Americans to save virtually tax free. The accounts were designed to work in the same way as some existing I.R.A.s but with much higher contribution limits—seventy-five hundred dollars a year for each person—and fewer restrictions on withdrawals. If this proposal had become law, a well-to-do family of four would have been able to shelter more than a million dollars over thirty years. Middle-class families, on the other hand, would have seen little benefit, because they spend most, if not all, of their income. More than ninety per cent of American families fail to put away the maximum sum allowed under existing retirement accounts, which is three thousand dollars a year for I.R.A.s and thirteen thousand dollars a year for 401(k) plans. After the savings initiative received a lukewarm reception in Congress, the White House dropped it, only to resurrect it, in a slightly modified form, earlier this year.

The Bush Administration portrayed most of these reforms as efforts to boost a lagging economy, rather than as part of a plan to reshape the tax system in a radical way, but conservative activists knew they were making progress. "A little bit like Reagan, people get the vibes," Norquist said. "They understand what we are trying to accomplish. Do you think it was an accident that the first three tax cuts moved toward expensing business expenditures, toward universal I.R.A.s, toward getting rid of the capital-gains tax, toward getting rid of the double taxation of dividend income, toward getting rid of the death tax? No. It is consistent with a vision."

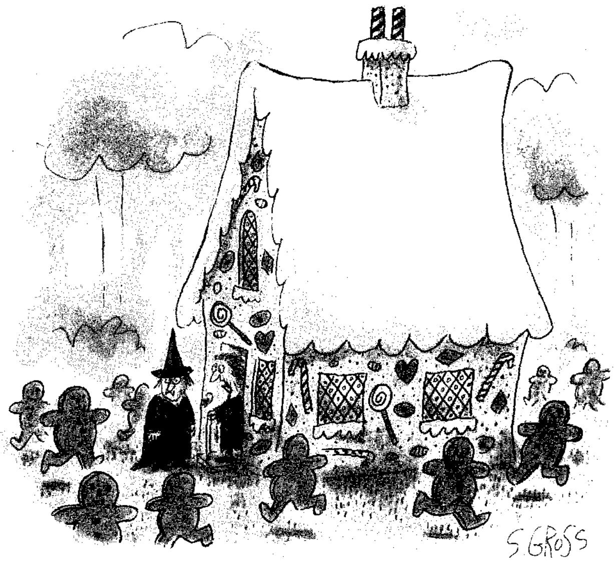
The day after his trip to Virginia, President Bush went to Niceville, Florida, where he was asked about the recent proposal from Dennis Hastert, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, to abolish the I.R.S. and replace the income tax with a national sales tax. "It's an interesting idea," Bush replied. "You know, I'm not exactly sure how big the national sales tax is going to have to be, but it's the kind of interesting idea that we ought to explore seriously." This



"ATKINS SAYS YOU SHOULD STAY AWAY FROM PEOPLE WITH HIGH BLOOD-SUGAR LEVELS."



"I USED TO HAVE TROUBLE PASSING THROUGH THE SPOUT, BUT THAT WAS BEFORE I WENT ON ATKINS."



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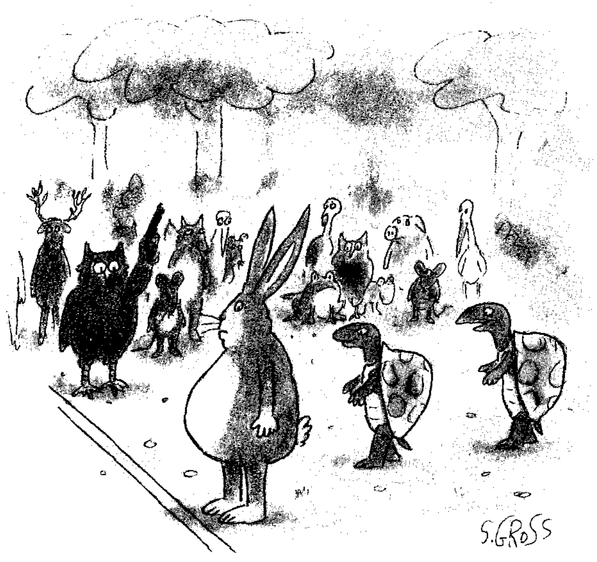

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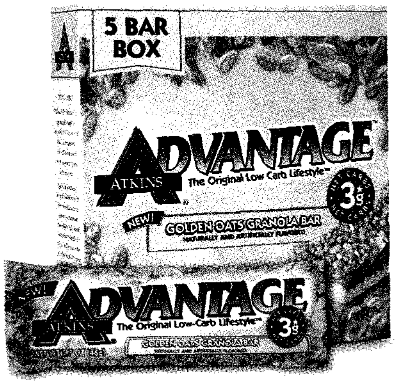

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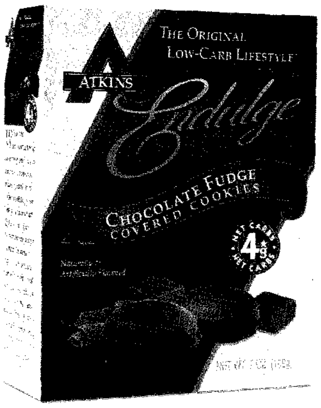

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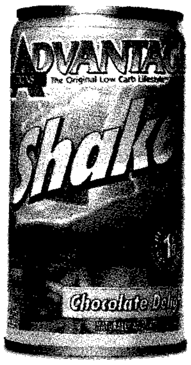

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Vince Wouldn't Give Her the Dark Gift Until the Fourth Date

doesn't mean that Bush is about to get rid of the income tax. Although he needs the support of Hastert and his followers, if he wins in November he will almost certainly continue his stealthy approach to tax reform. When I asked a senior official in the Bush-Cheney campaign about the idea of a national sales tax, he replied, "It's a wonderful debate to have in a Georgetown salon, but when it comes down to what is practical politics I don't think it is realistic, and the President won't take up proposals that aren't realistic."

Instead, Bush is campaigning to make permanent his existing tax cuts, which are slated to expire by 2011. At this week's Republican National Convention, he is also likely to expand upon the theme of ownership. He may well talk about establishing investment accounts within Social Security, as well as Retirement Savings Accounts and Lifetime Savings Accounts outside of Social Security, and health savings accounts, which his economic advisers view as a step toward individual, portable health-care coverage. Republican strategists believe that by emphasizing individual saving and investment the President is acting astutely. "The biggest demographic shift in the past thirty years is not the number of people who speak Spanish; it is the number of Americans who own stocks," Norquist told me. "It was twenty per cent of adults when Reagan was elected. Now it is sixty per cent, and seventy per cent of voters."

But while the President makes bland speeches about ownership, economists close to the Administration are pushing for a top-to-bottom revision of the tax code, featuring a major overhaul of corporate income tax and further cuts in personal income tax rates. If Bush is reëlected, the anticipated reform of the Alternative Minimum Tax, which Republicans in Congress loathe, may well serve as the pretext for this agenda. The A.M.T. sets a lower limit on the amount of federal tax that people have to pay, regardless of how many deductions they have. It already hits about two and a half million taxpayers, and more people are qualifying for it every year. "The A.M.T. offers a chance to discuss fundamental tax reform," Glenn Hubbard told me. "We would want a system that could replace the A.M.T. and the individual income tax with a new individual tax system."

Although Hubbard returned to his professorship at Columbia last year, he still acts as an informal adviser to the Bush campaign. He is one of several Harvard-trained economists who have worked in the Bush Administration. Hubbard and Larry Lindsey, who headed the National Economic Council from 2001 to 2002, both did graduate work under Martin Feldstein, an adviser to Bush in 2000, who has long argued that taxes, particularly taxes on savings, reduce economic growth. Greg Mankiw, Hubbard's successor as chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers, is a colleague of Feldstein's in the economics department at Harvard and shares many of his views. "There are a lot of us who believe that putting less of the tax on savings would be a good thing for the economy in the long run," Feldstein told me.

Rather than coming right out for a flat tax, the Harvard economists tend to use the less politically charged term "consumption tax." Flat taxes and consumption taxes are closely related: both exempt saving and tax spending. Theoretically, it is possible to set up a progressive consumption tax, but most conservative economists favor a single rate set as low as possible; i.e. a flat tax. Such a system would penalize middle-class people, who spend nearly all the money they earn; a fact Hall and Rabushka, the originators of the flat tax, were straightforward about. In 1983, they wrote that a flat tax "would be a tremendous boon to the economic elite," adding that "it is an obvious mathematical law that lower taxes on the successful will have to be made up by higher taxes on average people."

Bush's economic advisers describe their recommendations as technical changes, supported by economic research. If Americans saved more, they say, businesses would have more funds to invest in plant and equipment, which would enable them to generate extra output and pay higher wages. (One of the economic models the conservatives cite to support this argument was developed in the nineteen-fifties by a Democrat, Robert Solow, of M.I.T.) In practice, however, it is far from clear that cutting taxes leads to more saving in the economy as a whole. A tax cut that isn't accompanied by spending cuts, such as

Bush's, forces the Treasury to borrow more, which lowers the national rate of saving. By the same logic, one sure way to increase national saving is for the government to raise taxes and run a budget surplus. For some reason, conservative economists rarely mention this option.

Some of the consequences of Bush's policies are already clear. This year's budget deficit, at about 3.8 per cent of G.D.P., isn't as big as it was twenty years ago, when it reached six per cent of G.D.P., but, as the International Monetary Fund has pointed out, returning to a balanced budget will be even harder this time around. A decade ago, it took "tax hikes, a sharp contraction in military spending, and an unprecedented economic expansion to achieve fiscal consolidation," the I.M.F. noted. None of those things are on the horizon now.

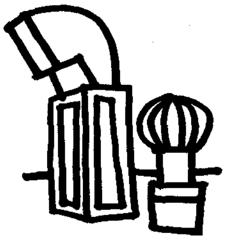
The White House claims that the deficit will fall by two-thirds, relative to G.D.P., in the next five years. However, this prediction assumes that the economy expands by about 3.5 per cent a year; that spending on programs other than entitlements, defense, and homeland security rises hardly at all; and that the Alternative Minimum Tax isn't cut back much. If economic growth comes in lower than forecast, government spending comes in higher, and Congress substantially modifies the A.M.T.—and all three are likely—the deficit will be bigger than projected.

Moreover, the White House's forecast extends only to 2009, when the baby boomers are due to start retiring, putting enormous demands on Medicare and Social Security. "Perhaps the biggest difference between Reagan and George W. Bush tax cuts is that, with Reagan, history gave us time to clean up the mess," Peter G. Peterson, who was Secretary of Commerce in the Nixon Administration, writes in his new book, "Running on Empty." "With George W., history may not be so indulgent."

Instead of trying to build up a surplus to help pay for the retirement of the boomers, the President would cut into future tax revenues by making his tax cuts permanent. According to William G. Gale and Peter R. Orszag, two economists at the Brookings Institution, this would cost about $1.8 trillion between now and 2014. "It is the height of deception to say we can only budget till 2009 but we are going to have massive tax cuts from 2010 onward," Gale said. "That is what the Administration has done."

Most people already know that Bush's tax cuts favored the rich, but the size of the giveaway was startling. Based on figures contained in a recent study from the Congressional Budget Office, it now appears that about two-thirds of the benefits went to households in the top fifth of the income distribution, and about one third went to households in the top one-hundredth of the distribution. To put it another way, families earning $1.2 million a year—that is, the richest one per cent in the country—received a tax break of roughly $78,500. Families earning $57,000 a year—middle-income families—got a tax cut of about $1,100.

Even these numbers, though, do not convey the full ambition of the Republicans' agenda, which potentially involves a historic restructuring of the American system of government. Roughly two-thirds of taxable income is paid to workers in the form of wages and benefits. The other third goes to reward capital, or accumulated savings, in the form of corporate profits, dividends, and interest payments. If Bush's economic agenda was fully enacted, the vast bulk of these payments wouldn't be taxed at all, and labor would end up shouldering practically the entire burden of financing the federal government. In a new book, "Neoconomy: George Bush's Revolutionary Gamble with America's Future," Daniel Altman, a former economics reporter for the *Times* and *The Economist*, describes what such a system might look like. "The fortunate and growing minority who managed to receive all their income from stocks, bonds and other securities would pay nothing—not a dime—for America's cancer research, its international diplomacy, its military deterrent, the maintenance of the interstate highway system, the space program or almost anything else the federal government did.... Broadly speaking, that fortunate minority would be free-riders."



A return to the Victorian world of rentiers and laborers may seem like an outlandish scenario, but a generation ago it would have been difficult to imagine a White House, even a Republican one, phasing out the inheritance tax, which affects only a tiny minority of the richest families, and slashing the taxes on dividends and capital gains, which few middle-class families pay, either. The people who devised these policies simply do not accept the old rules. Glenn Hubbard, for instance, told me that the progressive income tax "discourages entrepreneurship and risk-taking. We have to trade off our interest in fairness with those costs. I, like many conservative economists, care a lot about progressivity at the bottom. President Bush, for example, made the Earned Income Tax Credit"—a handout to low-income families—"more generous. But progressivity at the top? I don't know. That just sounds like envy to me."

Language like this won't figure prominently at the Convention this week, at least from the podium, but should Bush win in November it is sure to reappear, as the conservative institutes and right-wing lobbying groups continue to promote their agenda, which now includes cutting the dividends tax and the capital-gains tax to zero, getting rid of the corporate income tax, and halving the size of federal spending, from twenty per cent of G.D.P. to ten per cent. "Here's the bottom line of it," Stephen Moore said. "The Republican Party is now a supply-side party. It's a tax-cut party, thanks to people like Grover Norquist and the Club for Growth. We've pushed it in that direction. It has evolved over the past forty years from being a party of Eisenhower balanced-budget Republicans into a party of Reaganite pro-growth advocates.

"That strategy is not just better economically; it also has political benefits, because, in my opinion, nobody lost an election in the past twenty years because of budget deficits. You couldn't point to a single congressional race where a candidate lost because of a big budget deficit. People might say in the polls, 'Oh, yes, I'm very concerned about budget deficits.' But does it change people's voting patterns? No." ♦

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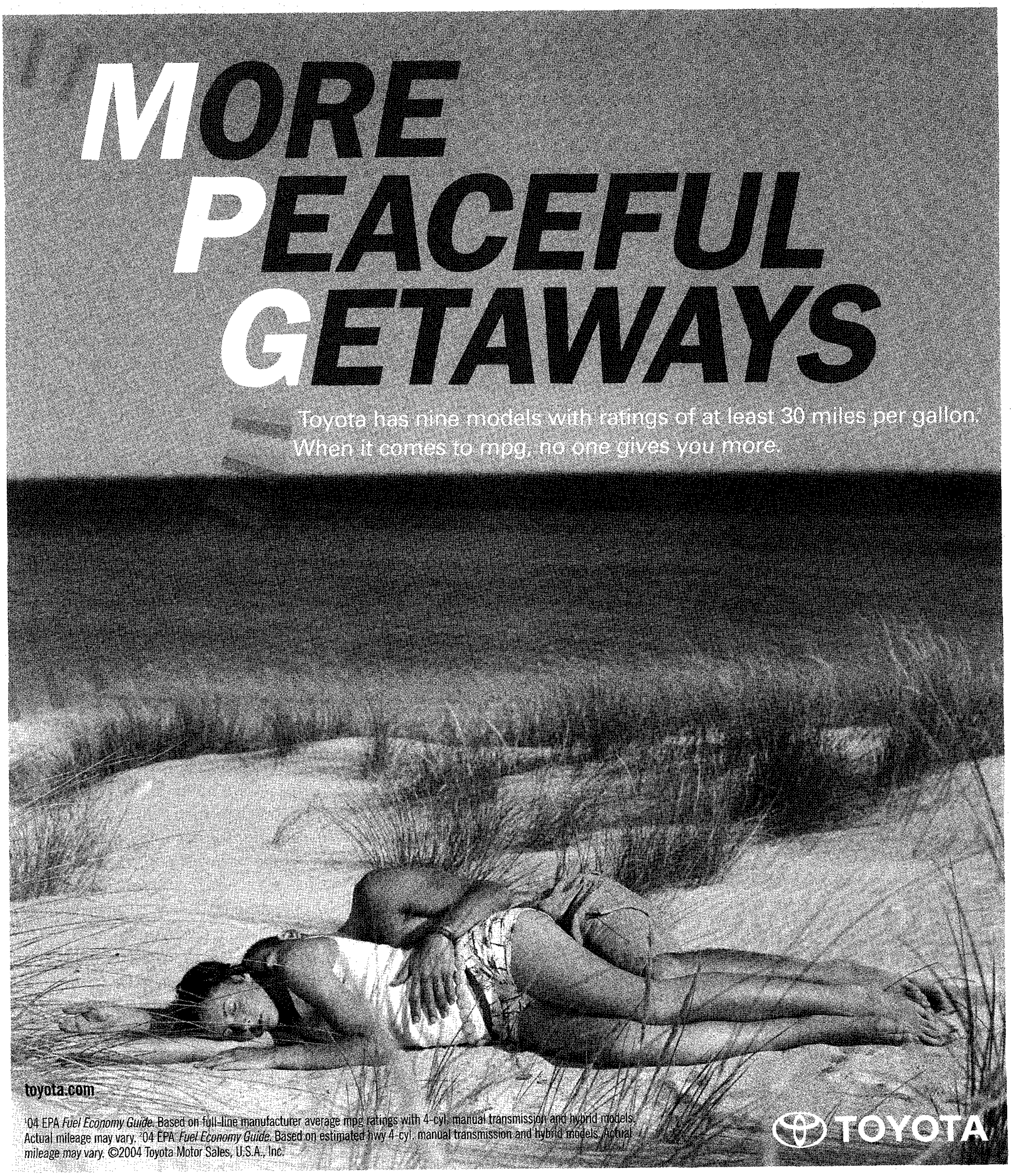

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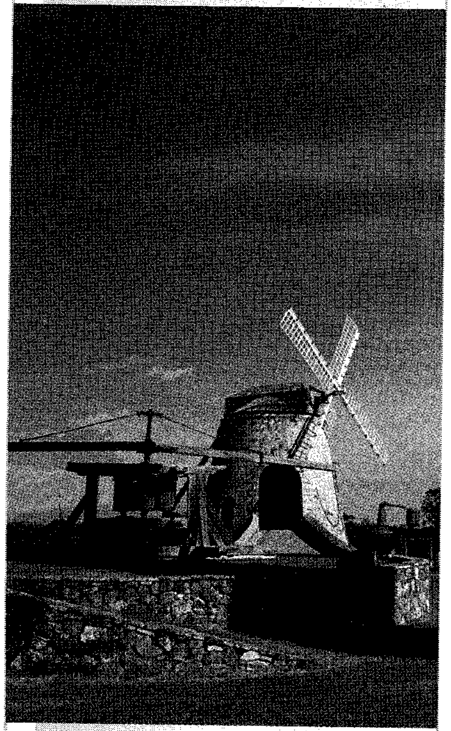

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ANNALS OF EATING

A REALLY BIG LUNCH

Thirty-seven courses and thirteen wines.

BY JIM HARRISON

On our frequent American road trips, my friend Guy de la Valdène has invariably said at lunch, "These French fries are filthy," but he always eats them anyway, and some of mine, too. Another friend, the painter Russell Chatham, likes to remind me that we pioneered the idea of ordering multiple entrées in restaurants back in the seventies—the theory being that if you order several entrées you can then avoid the terrible disappointment of having ordered the wrong thing while others at the table have inevitably ordered the right thing. The results can't have been all that bad, since both of us are still more or less alive, though neither of us owns any spandex.

Is there an interior logic to overeating, or does gluttony, like sex, wander around in a messy void, utterly resistant to our attempts to make sense of it? Not very deep within us, the hungry heart howls, "Supersize me." When I was a boy, in northern Michigan, feeding my grandfather's pigs, I was amazed at their capacity. Before I was caught in the act and chided by my elders, I had empirically determined that the appetite of pigs was limitless. As I dawdled in the barnyard, the animals gazed at me as fondly as many of us do at great chefs. Life is brutishly short and we wish to eat well, and for this we must generally travel to large cities, or, better yet, to France.

Never before have the American people had their noses so deeply in one another's business. If I announce that I and eleven other diners shared a thirty-seven-course lunch that likely cost as much as a new Volvo station wagon, those of a critical nature will let their minds run in tiny, aghast circles of condemnation. My response to them is that none of us twelve disciples of gourmandise wanted a new Volvo. We wanted only lunch, and since lunch lasted approximately eleven hours we saved money by not having to buy dinner. The defense rests.

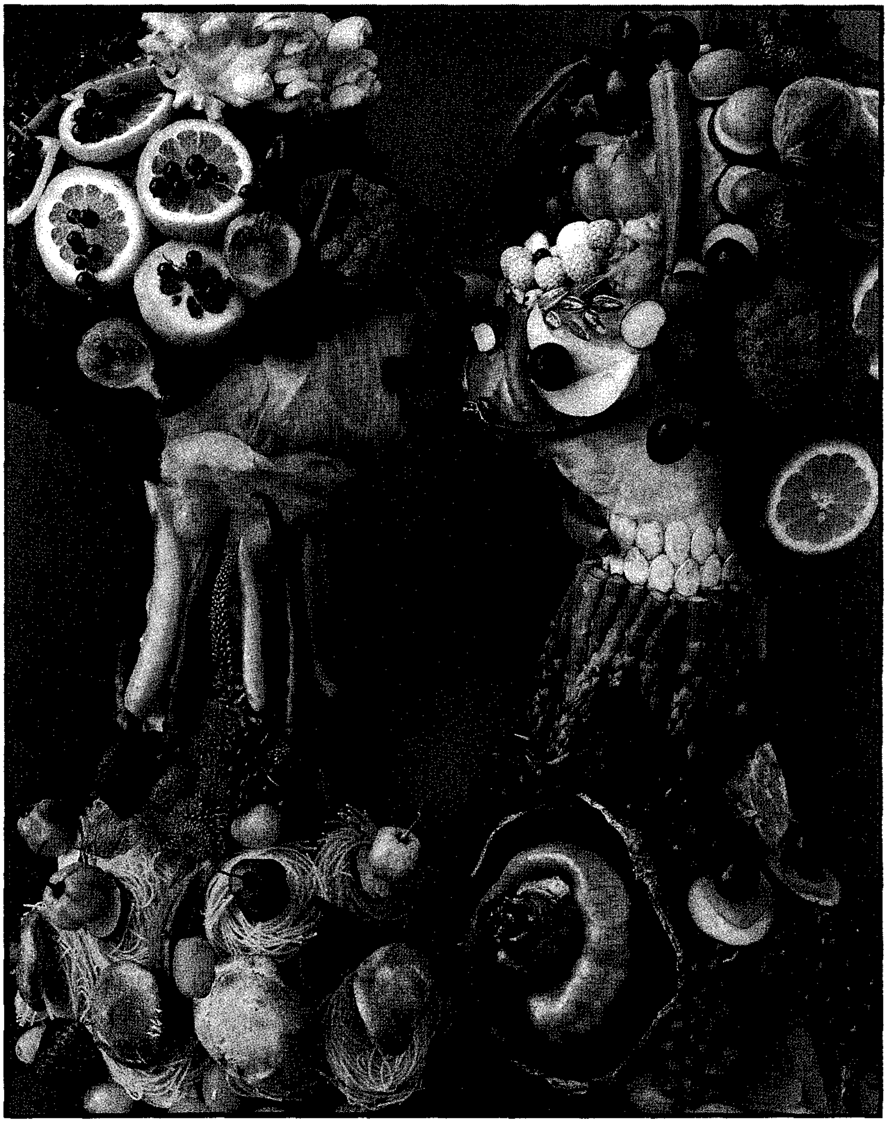
Some would also think it excessive to travel all the way from Montana to Marc Meneau's L'Espérance, in Burgundy, for lunch, but I don't. Although there are signs of a culinary revolution in the United States, this much bandied renaissance is for people in cities such as New York, San Francisco, Seattle, and Chicago. When travelling across America over the past forty years, I've repeatedly sought extreme unction of a sort while in the midst of digestive death in the parking lots of restaurants. I've found it best, in these situations, to get some distance—to drive for a while, pull over, take a walk, fall to my knees, and pray for better food in the future.

I suspect that it's inappropriate to strand myself on a high horse when it comes to what people eat. We have proved ourselves inept fools on so many mortal fronts—from our utter disregard of the natural world to our notions of ethnic virtue to the hellish marriage of politics and war—that perhaps we should be allowed to pick at garbage like happy crows. When I was growing up in the Calvinist Midwest, the assumption that we eat to live, not live to eat, was part of the Gospels. (With the exception, of course, of holiday feasts. Certain women were famous for their pie-making abilities, while certain men, like my father, were admired for being able to barbecue two hundred chickens at once for a church picnic.) I recall that working in the fields for ten hours a day required an ample breakfast and three big sandwiches for lunch. At the time, I don't think I believed I was all that different from the other farm animals.

It's a long road from a childhood in rural Michigan to being the sort of man who gets invited to a thirty-seven-course lunch. But, above all, a gourmand is one who is able to keep eating when no longer hungry, and a gourmand without a rich sense of the comic is a pathetic piggy, indeed. Once, at Taillevent, in Paris (a restaurant that is always referred to as a "temple of gastronomy"), I had the uncomfortable sense that I was in a funeral parlor. I heard no laughter except from my own table. And when I wanted a taste of Calvados as an entremets the waiter actually told me that I'd have to be patient until after the cheese course, an hour distant. Luckily, an intemperate French count who was at my table told the waiter to bring my Calvados immediately or he would slap his face; at those prices, you don't want to be schooled. Haute cuisine has rules for those who love rules. Those rules have, for the most part, driven me into the arms of bistros. If I were given the dreary six months to live, I'd head at once to Lyons and make my way from bistro to bistro in a big stroller pushed by a vegetarian.

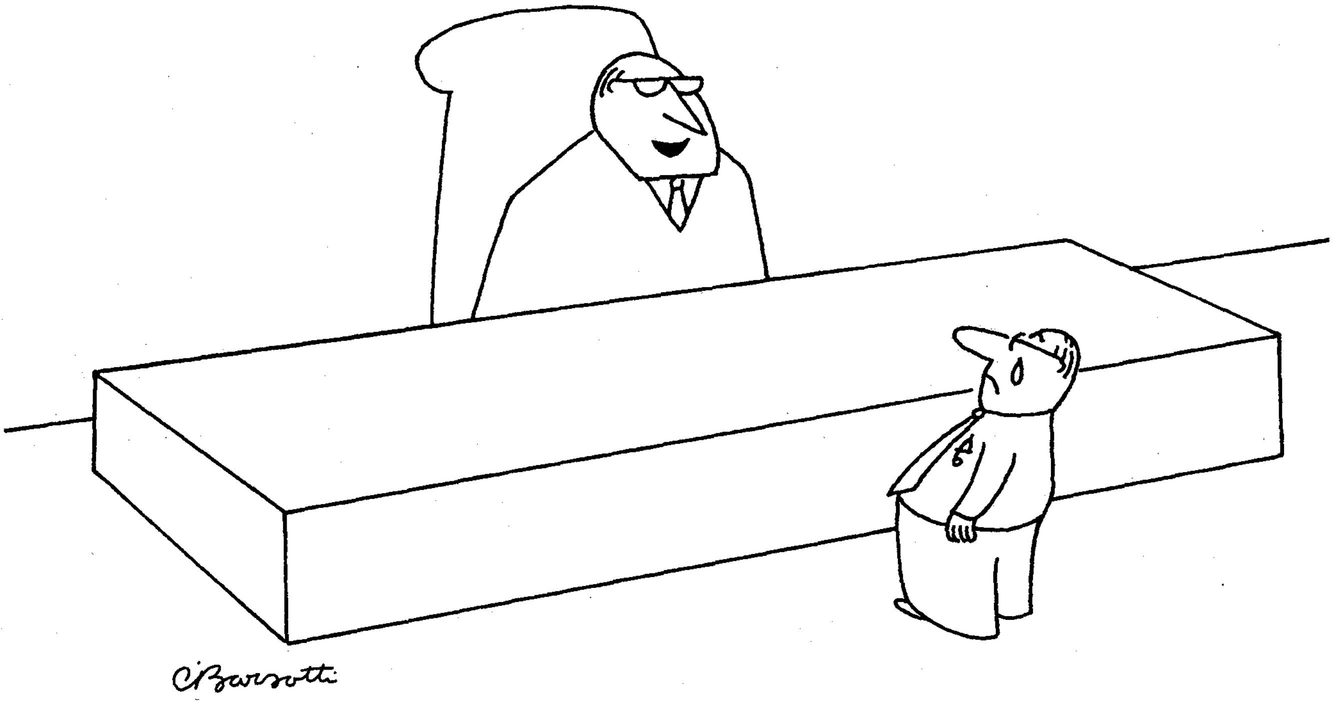
The thirty-seven-course lunch, which was held on November 17th of last year, was based on recipes by the great cooks and food writers of the past (among them Le Maréchal de Richelieu, Nicolas de Bonnefons, Pierre de Lune, Massialot, La Varenne, Marin, Grimod de La Reynière, Brillat-Savarin, Mercier, La Chapelle, Menon, and Carême), and drawn from seventeen cookbooks published between 1654 and 1823. It was food with a precise and determinable history. My host for the lunch was Gérard Oberlé, a man of unquestionable genius, whom I had met a decade earlier at a wine-and-book festival near Saumur, on the Loire. I don't recall seeing any books at the three-day party, where I was a wine judge, along with Alain Robbe-Grillet and Gérard Depardieu. (None of us was particularly startled when we were told that the wines had been "pre-judged" and were there for decoration only.) Early one morning, I discovered Oberlé eating a sturdy platter of charcuterie on the patio of the château where we were staying. It took me a number of years to uncover all the aspects of his character—as if I were peeling the laminae from a giant Bermuda onion (which Gérard somewhat physically resembles, but then so does the Buddha). Gérard is a book collector and a dealer in illuminated manuscripts, a musicologist with a weekly program on Radio France, a novelist and an essayist, an "expert of experts" dealing with insurance fraud (assessing the actual value of private libraries destroyed by fire), a countertenor who once sang Purcell's "Come Ye Sons of Art" while woodcock hunting in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, a student of the history of French food who has produced a couple of what he calls "two-kilo" bibliographies on the subject, a wine and salami scholar, a former officer in a society for the protection of the integrity of *fromages de tête* (headcheese), a culinary eccentric, and a grand cook. Once, in Cancale, on the Brittany coast, where we were eating the rare and enormous seventy-year-old oysters known as *pieds de cheval* (horse's feet), he remarked, "These would be difficult to eat in a car."

Soon after I met Gérard, I visited his manor, in Burgundy, where he prepared a particularly interesting dish of ancient origin—a torte of fifty baby pigs' noses. "Really a simple dish," he said. As he explained it, you soak the pigs' noses overnight in clear water, then simmer them for about two hours in red wine, herbs, and garlic. Later, you add potatoes and bake the dish with the upturned noses forming a delightful mosaic on the surface. Such dishes are usually only for the extremely curious or those with an agricultural background. I recall both of my grandmothers boiling pigs' heads with herbs and onions to make a headcheese, for which the especially toothsome cheek, tongue, and neck meat was extracted, covered with the cooking liquid, and gelatinized in a glass dish.


The chef was Marc Meneau, of L'Espérance. His only advice was "Courage."

RUVEN AFANADOR

By the time I met Gérard, I had already been exposed to excesses of every sort, including those of the film industry, and I had known a number of big eaters, myself included. But I had never met a truly refined big eater. Not long afterward, Gérard threw a dinner with fifty courses. Why? Because it was his fiftieth



"That was fun—now you're rehired."

• •

birthday. Why else? When I first read the menu, it seemed incomprehensible to me, though there was an interior logic—the meal was designed after one described in Petronius' Satyricon.

This is not to say that Gérard concentrates on the arcane and the frivolous. In my dozen or so visits to his home, I've experienced many French standards, in versions better than any I'd had before. You know you are not in a restaurant when you enter Gérard's kitchen and notice a wooden bowl with a kilo of black truffles waiting to be added to your all-time favorite dish, *poulet demi-deuil*, or "chicken in half-mourning." The dead fowl has been honored by so many truffle slices, slid under its skin, that it appears to be wearing black (not to mention the large truffle stuffed in the bird's cavity, to comfort its inner chicken). When I said, "Gérard, you shouldn't have," he replied, "I'm a bachelor. I have no heirs."

Over the years, on my visits to France, Guy de la Valdène, Gérard, and I had discussed the possibilities for a "theme" meal, and we had read the menus of several that Gérard had already given. At a certain point, it began to seem entirely reasonable to plan a lunch that began with twenty-four courses and then urged itself upward. And no restaurant was more logical a location than L'Espérance, in the village of Saint-Père-sous-Vézelay, a scant hour and a half from Gérard's home, in the Morvan. Of all the great chefs in France, Marc Meneau, a very tall man who looms above his employees as did de Gaulle above his citizenry, is one of the least aggressive, apparently devoid of any interest in becoming a public figure. His restaurant, long a required destination for gourmands, is pure country French, elegantly set in a grand garden, with nothing whatsoever in its décor to intimidate the customer. (And it would soon regain the third Michelin star that it had lost in 1999.)

Gérard had known Meneau for years, and with Guy and me safely at home in the United States he proceeded to plan the feast, using his improbable library as the source. Having once sat in on an after-lunch confab on the "*vrai ancien coq au vin*" (reduce seven litres of Merlot down to one, whisk in the rooster blood, etc.), I can only imagine the countless hours of discussion that ensued between Gérard and Meneau.

When the morning of the event finally arrived, I wasn't particularly hungry. This didn't alarm me—many professional athletes before a big game feel that they would prefer to spend the day with their Tinkertoys or in the arms of Lucrezia Borgia. I had already been off my diet for two weeks, touring the French countryside with Guy and Peter Lewis, a Seattle restaurateur. Everywhere we went, we ate the best food available, with the excuse, not totally accurate, that we'd worked hard, saved our pennies, and had it coming. (The novelist Tom McGuane once noted that in the course of thirty-five years of correspondence between us I had lost a total of eighteen hundred pounds—so I was really "getting down there.")

The day dawned cool and misty. There was a certain anxiety in the air at the manor, with Gérard watching to make sure that I didn't partake of the breakfast that I thought I needed. All I wanted was a simple slab of the game pâté from the evening before, but when I tried to sneak into the kitchen from the outside pantry door he was there in front of the fridge like a three-hundred-pound albino cat.

I've always felt that there is no lovelier village in France than Vézelay, and no lovelier religious building than its cathedral on the hill, the Madeleine of Vézelay. I'm not Catholic, but I've lit candles in that church in prayer for troubled friends, and it has always worked.

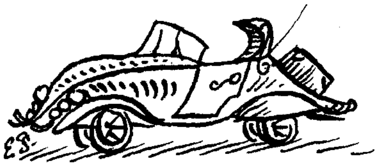
At least, they're all still showing vital signs. But I had no time to run up the steep hill and light a candle for my own digestion. The twelve of us sat down at noon. To my left was the vintner Didier Dagueneau, whose exquisite Pouilly-Fumé we had been drinking since our initial Krug Grande Cuvée. The first time I met Didier, I was startled by his appearance, which is that of a Minnesotan pulp cutter. During the winter downtime at his vineyard, in Pouilly, he travels far north, toward the Arctic, to run the dozens of sled dogs that he owns and whose racket irritates his neighbors. To my right was Gilles Brézol, Gérard's business partner and a man of sophisticated intelligence, who taught French for a year in Alabama and Nevada during the civil-rights upheaval. I've had dozens of meals with Gilles, who eats as much as I do but remains irritatingly slender. In fact, in this group of mostly book collectors and journalists sworn to secrecy no one was technically obese. Although the lunch had originally been planned for eleven, a twelfth guest, a beautifully tailored, elderly French gentleman, unknown to all of us, had been invited by Meneau, in accordance with the superstitious notion that any large group should include a stranger, who might very well be an angel in disguise.

Meneau came out of the kitchen; his only advice was "*Courage*" (or "coo-rahj," as my phrase book likes to say). We began with a girlish delicacy—a clear soup made from poultry, diced vegetables, and crayfish—followed by tartines of foie gras, truffles, and lard. The next soup was a velvety cream of squab with cucumbers, served with cock-crest fritters. Then there was a soothing crayfish bisque, and I began to wonder how long we would be pursuing the soup motif.

But, oddly, I felt squeamish about the first of the hors d'œuvres—oysters and cream of Camembert on toast, which proved to be the only course I couldn't eat. (We all have our own food phobias, and a mixture of pungent cheese and oysters makes my little tummy recoil.) Next came a chilled jellied loaf of poultry on sorrel cream, followed by a private joke on me—fresh Baltic herring with mayonnaise. (According to my late mother, I was wild about herring from the age of two. Her family was Swedish, and the fish was a staple.) I loved the tart of calf's brains with shelled peas but was not terribly fond of the omelette with sea urchin, a dish that Louis XV liked to prepare for himself—though it was certainly better than the cottage cheese with ketchup that Richard Nixon favored as a snack. (There is a well-founded rumor that George W. Bush nibbles on bologna with marshmallow bonbons.) A filet of sole with champagne sauce accompanied by monkfish livers was wonderful, as was the roasted pike spiked with parsley. I did pause to consider whether all of these hors d'œuvres might dampen my appetite for the main courses. The wine steward noted my unrest, and a quick goblet of Montrachet tickled my enthusiasm upward. There were only two pure-blood Americans at the table, Peter Lewis and I, and we had agreed not to shame our own holy empire.

We headed into the "second service" without an appropriate break—say, a five-mile march through the mountains and an eight-hour nap. The courses, naturally, became more substantial. First came an oven-glazed brill served with fennel cream, anchovies, and roasted currants, then a stew of suckling pig that had been slow-cooked in a red-wine sauce thickened with its own blood, onions, and bacon. I leaped forward from this into a warm terrine of hare with preserved plums, and a poached eel with chicken wing tips and testicles in a pool of tarragon butter. But I only picked at my glazed partridge breasts, which were followed by a savory of eggs poached in Chimay ale, and then a mille-feuille of puff pastry sandwiched with sardines and leeks.

Now it was halftime, though there were no prancing cheerleaders. The menu advised us to "languish" in the salon and nibble on ravioli with carrots and cumin and thick slices of "Noirs eggs of puff pastry with squab hearts." Instead, I went outside, where the grass was wet and my feet seemed to sink in even farther than usual. In the walled herb garden, I began to reflect that this kind of eating might not be a wise choice in the late autumn of my life. Perhaps I should fax the menu to my cardiologist in the States before proceeding? I soon realized that this was one of the ten million insincere impulses I've had in my life. I began to walk faster for a dozen yards and almost jumped a creek, but then thought better of it.



The "third service" loaded even bigger guns, or so it seemed, with its concentration on denser, heavier specialties that tried the patience of my long-fled appetite. From Massialot, we were offered a "light" stew of veal breast in a purée of ham and oysters in a pastry-covered casserole, and a not-so-light gratin of beef cheeks. La Varenne's gray squab was boned, stuffed with sweetbreads, squab livers, and scallions, and spit-roasted. It was the Prince des Dombes who said, "Nothing arouses me but taste" (*"Je ne me pique que de goût"*). He would have been a disappointing match for a vigorous girl. You can imagine her hanging a rope ladder from her tower bedroom for knights-errant—or, better yet, woodchoppers and stable hands—to climb, while the Prince aroused himself in the kitchen. From his files, we had wild duck with black olives and orange zest, a *buisson* (bush) of crayfish with little slabs of grilled goose liver, a terrine of the tips of calves' ears, hare cooked in port wine inside a calf's bladder, crispy breaded asparagus, a sponge cake with fruit preserves, and cucumbers stewed in wine.

It was consoling to begin winding down with a swirl of turnips in sweetened wine, radishes preserved in vinegar, a warm salad with almonds, cream of grilled pistachios, meringues, macaroons, and chocolate cigarettes. These were simple warmups to the medley of desserts served to us in the salon: a rosette of almond milk with almonds; a soft cheese of fresh cream with quince jelly; rice whipped with sweetened egg whites and lemon peel; a grand ring-shaped cake, a savarin, flamed with Old Havana rum and served with preserved pineapple; little molds of various ice creams; and a "towering structure of every fruit imaginable in every manner imaginable."

Sad to say, my notes from the meal

are blurred and smeared by the cooked exudates of flora and fauna and the wines that rained down on us as if from the world's best garden sprinkler. Reading through the veil of grease, I see that my favorites among the wines served were Chablis Les Clos, Montrachet 1989, Volnay-Champans 1969, Château Latour 1989, and Côte Rôtie. Of course, any fool would love these great wines as he felt his wallet vaporize.

There. Time to do dishes. As Diderot said of a lunch at the fabulously wealthy Baron of Holbach's home, "After lunch, one takes a little walk, or one digests, if it's even possible." Night had long since fallen, and I reflected that lunch had taken the same amount of time as a Varig flight from New York to São Paulo.

In the salon, my fellow-diners were yawning rather than gasping or sobbing. Was this another example of the banality of evil: a grievous sin committed—in this case, gluttony—and no one squirming with guilt? I have noticed that Frenchmen are far less susceptible to heart disease, in part because they don't seem to experience the stress of self-doubt or regret. My mother, a Swedish Lutheran, liked to ask her five children, "What have you accomplished today?" If I'd told her, "I have eaten thirty-seven courses and drunk thirteen wines," I would have been cast into outer darkness. But then this was the Iron Mom, who also said, with a tiny smile, in reference to my life's work, "You've made quite a living out of your fibs."

At midnight, while sipping a paltry brandy from the nineteen-twenties and smoking a Havana Churchill, I reflected that this was not the time to ponder eternal values. I was sitting next to Gérard, who was cherubically discussing the historical subtleties of certain courses. In a way, we were forensic anthropologists, doing arduous historical field work. How could we possibly understand the present without knowing what certain of our ancestors had consumed? Marc Meneau, his lovely wife, Françoise, and thirty-nine members of his staff had led us on a sombre and all-consuming journey into the past.

At dawn or a few hours thereafter, I felt relieved, on stepping out of the bathtub, that I hadn't fallen on a hard surface and broken open like an overly mature muskmelon.

No question looms larger on a daily basis for many of us than "What's for lunch?" and, when that has been resolved, "What's for dinner?" There have been mutterings that the whole food thing has gone too far in America, but I think not. Good food is a benign weapon against the sodden way we live.

By the time I reached Paris the next afternoon and took a three-hour stroll, I was feeling a little peckish. I'd heard that certain quarrels had already arisen over our lunch, and I felt lucky that my capacity for the French language was limited to understanding only the gist of conversations—sort of the way the average American comprehends our government. On the phone, the natives were restless to the point of "scandal," and from the tornado of rumors (everyone knows that men, not women, are the masters of gossip) I learned that many had found both the food and the service disappointing, the lack of "theatre" sad. (As for myself, I couldn't make a judgment. I once helped to cook a whole steer and a barrel of corn for a picnic in Michigan and have eaten many ten-course dinners, but our French lunch had left those occasions in the numbered dust.) The most interesting rumor I heard was that the tab for the lunch had been picked up by a Louisiana billionaire, who couldn't attend because a pelican had been sucked into an engine of his Gulfstream. This detail was so extraordinary that it seemed likely to be true.

That last evening in Paris, before my flight and the tonic Chicago-style hot dog that awaited me at O'Hare, Peter and I dined at Thoumieux, my old standby restaurant, near the Invalides. We had a simple Gigondas, and I ordered two vegetable courses, then relented at the last moment and added a duck confit. Long flights are physically exhausting, and good nutrition lays the foundation of life. On Air France, I was sunk in profound thought, or so I felt at the time. Like sex, bathing, sleeping, and drinking, the effects of food don't last. The patterns are repeated but finite. Life is a near-death experience, and our devious minds will do anything to make it interesting. ♦

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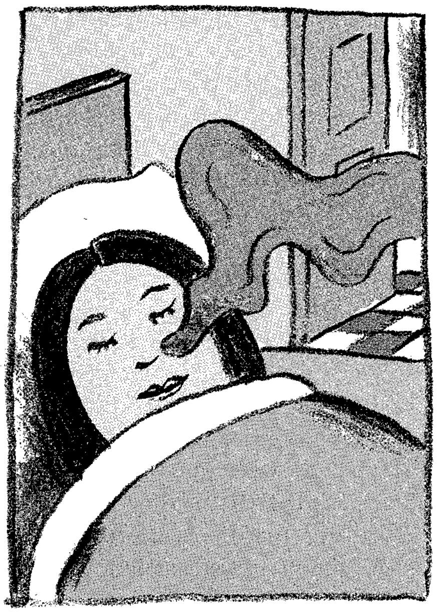
COOKING LESSONS

THE LONG WAY HOME

Bengal by way of Julia Child.

BY JHUMPA LAHIRI

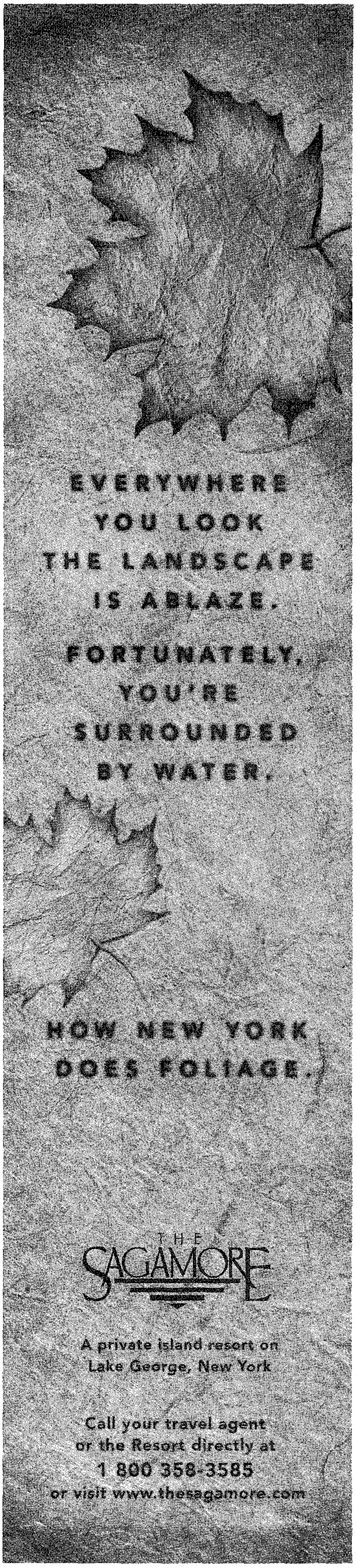


Saturdays, when I was growing up, I would often be woken by the powerful, almost meaty stench of powdered asafetida hitting a pan, or the insistent drone of my mother's blender, pulverizing whole roots of ginger or a dozen heads of garlic. I would come downstairs and find her at the stove, all four burners going, the sink crammed with colanders, the spices she stored in large brown Cremora jars pulled down from the cupboards. She would have been up since four, preparing for a dinner party for a crowd of fifty or more. There was always, simultaneously, lamb and fish and shrimp, and a minimum of four vegetable dishes, and dal and chutney, and two or three selections for dessert, all of it preceded by an assortment of stuffed croquettes and breaded cutlets, which she served as appetizers. She had learned to cook by watching and helping her mother in Calcutta, and she insisted on undertaking the labor-intensive dishes that most of my parents' Bengali-immigrant friends no longer bothered to attempt. She got down on the floor to pound turmeric or chilies on a massive grinding stone. She boiled gallons of milk for fresh channa, made fritters out of shad roe, and prepared her own baris—lentil wafers that she would set out, like dozens of miniature cookies, to dry on our sundeck in Rhode Island.

If her hands were dirty, I might crack an egg for her, or pour some bread crumbs onto a plate. On rare occasions, she let me roll out a luchi and slip it into the bubbling oil in her karhai, but from the way she hovered, and monitored, anxious that the disk of dough would not puff up in my unpracticed hands, the message was clear: cooking was her jurisdiction. It was also her secret. My mother owned no cookbooks, just as she owned no measuring cups or spoons. To this day, if friends ask how she made a particular dish, she cryptically replies, "It's nothing, really, you simply take all the ingredients and put them in the pot." One Mother's Day, I gave her a pretty turquoise-blue blank book, asking her to write down some recipes for me. She filled in a page or two, with instructions on how to make samosas, then stopped. Some years later, my sister made the same request, with similarly evasive results.

When I was eighteen, I left for college in New York City, and for the next four years I subsisted on bagels, Granny Smith apples, and cold noodles with sesame sauce. It wasn't until after graduation that I started cooking. I had moved to Boston, where I took classes at Harvard and worked part time in a bookstore. Suddenly, there was time to do the sorts of adult things alien to undergraduate life. I was invited to my first dinner parties. Some featured casseroles of the Campbell's-soup persuasion; others introduced me to risotto, endives, mascarpone cheese. I shopped at the Italian markets in the North End, clipped recipes from the *Times Magazine*, and checked out cookbooks from the library, writing down, on the backs of postcards,

SEYMOUR CHWAST



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BLUE FOOD

It is often said that there are no naturally blue foods – however, according to the account of P.L. Simmonds in his *The Curiosities of Food* (1859): *the bluish flesh of the toucan, notwithstanding its enormous and unsightly beak, is a wholesome and delicate meat; and there are no birds that give the Trinidad epicure a more delicious meal.*

OSTRICH EGGS

1 ostrich egg is equivalent to 24 hen's eggs. The Khoikhoi would place an egg on hot ashes, pierce the shell and stir the contents into an omelette.

HOMER SIMPSON'S 'Mmms...'

Some of the things that have caused Homer Simpson to drool 'Mmm...':

Mmm . . . . donuts
Mmm . . . . money
Mmm . . the Land of Chocolate
Mmm . . . . invisible Cola
Mmm . . . . free goo
Mmm . . . . bowling-fresh
Mmm. . . . . caramel
Mmm . . . . . organized crime
Mmm. . . . . urinal-fresh
Mmm . . . unprocessed fishsticks
Mmm . . . maca-ma-damia nuts
Mmm. . . . . . . elephant-fresh
Mmm . . . . hog fat
Mmm. . . . footlong chili dog

QUOTE

"A plethora of conversion tables, offbeat recipes and culinary lexicons make it an invaluable kitchen tool and addition to any cook's library."—*Time Out New York*

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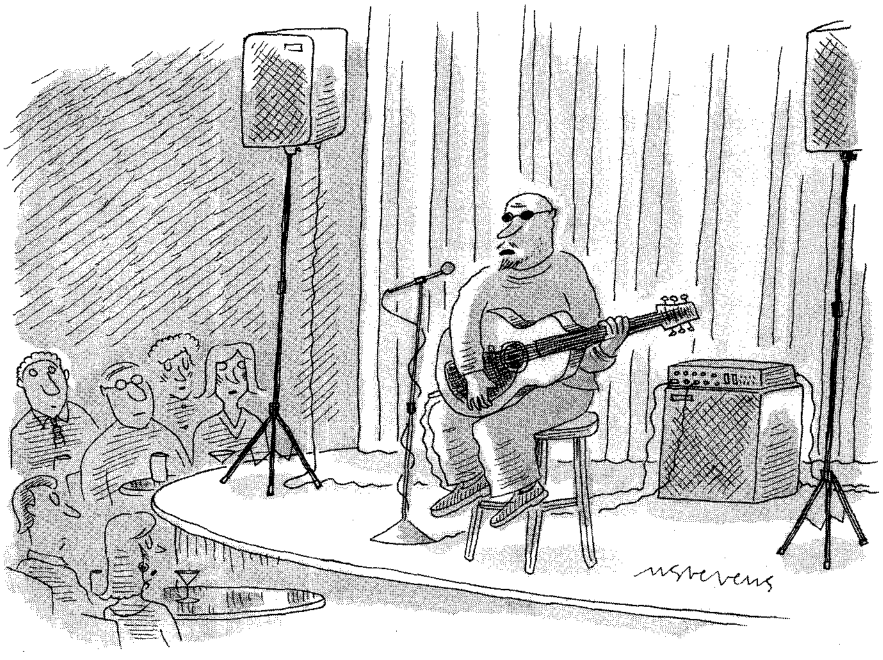
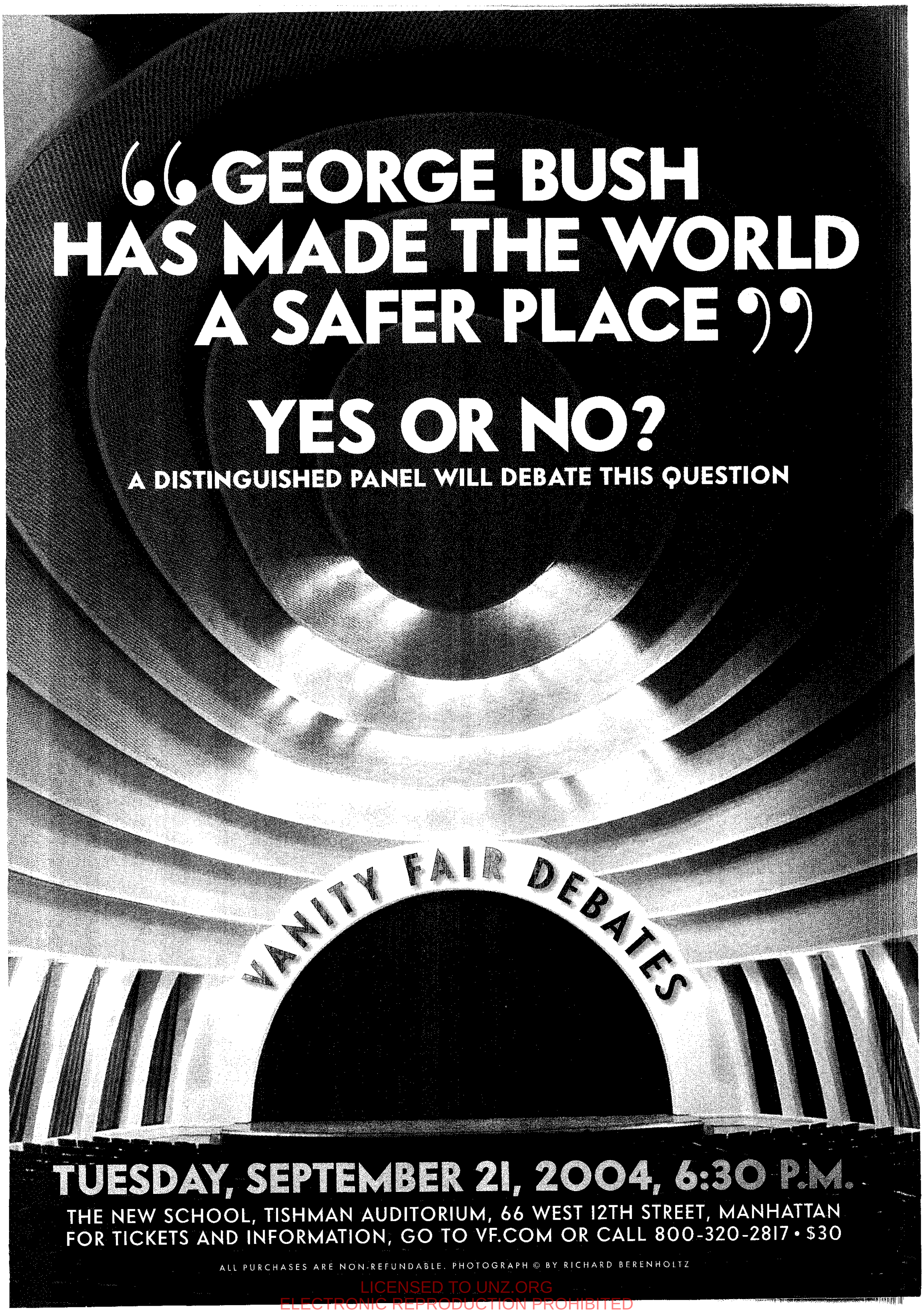
recipes that seemed promising. The first time I threw a dinner party, in a triple-decker in Somerville for my two housemates and two other friends, I prepared farfalle with olives, lemon rind, and sun-dried tomatoes, something that seemed quite exotic at the time. I did not make Indian food, not because I didn't like to eat it but because it remained my mother's territory. My new guides were Julia Child, Giuliano Bugialli, Marcella Hazan. My mother condescended toward Western cooking, which she believed was all either crudely boiled or baked. Some evenings, she'd call and ask what I was having for dinner. "Pasta," I'd tell her, in the process of making, say, a four-hour Bolognese. "Oh, pasta," she would reply, imagining me pouring Ragú from a jar over a plate of Ronzoni.

Eventually, in my graduate-student years, I began to cook Indian food. I did not ask my mother for instructions, nor did she offer any. Instead, it was "Madhur Jaffrey's Indian Cooking" that told me what to do. It wasn't exactly my mother's style of cooking. Jaffrey comes from Delhi, not Bengal, and I knew that my mother, loyal to the idiosyncrasies of her region, would find certain recipes in that book heretical, like one that calls for seasoning cauliflower with fennel and mustard seeds. Nevertheless, I began to understand the techniques and philosophy of what my mother did in the kitchen. When Jaffrey started one recipe by putting ginger and garlic into a blender, I thought of my mother, and of the supply that she always kept in large yogurt containers in the refrigerator, already one step ahead.

When I went home to visit my parents, I began to offer to make a korma for dinner, or eggplant with yogurt sauce. To my surprise, my mother conceded, even occasionally allowing me to prepare something when she entertained. At one Thanksgiving dinner, she proudly told her guests that I had made the murgh masallam, and she seemed pleased to serve the spice-coated whole chickens instead of roast turkey. Still, as I consulted my cookbook, or measured out exactly two teaspoons of ground coriander, I must have seemed a fledgling in her eyes. She discreetly observed everything I did, and slowly her secrets emerged. "I always put a bit of sugar in my curries," she would casually mention. "If you stir a little water into your dry spices before adding them, they taste less chalky." For my parents' thirtieth anniversary, she let my sister and me cook an entire Indian meal for them and a few of their friends. She fretted over the fact that we did not place foil in the broiler, to catch the drippings from the lamb kebabs. But when the meal that we had spent all day cooking was assembled, the eight dishes lined up on her table from end to end, she took a photograph. ♦



"This one's for me."



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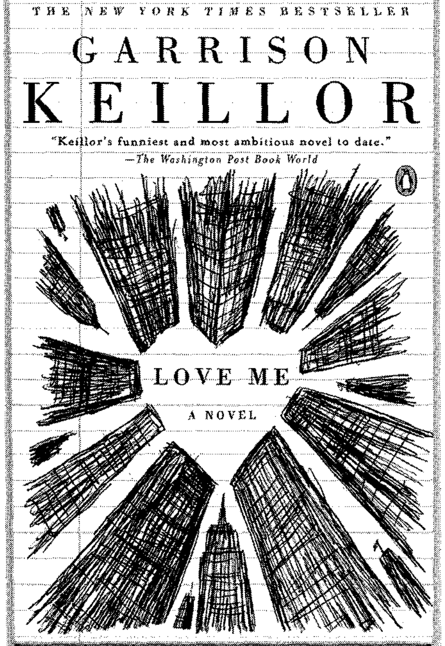
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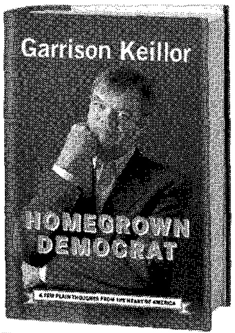

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LETTER FROM SOUTH AFRICA

DISSED FISH

The strange attraction of snoek.

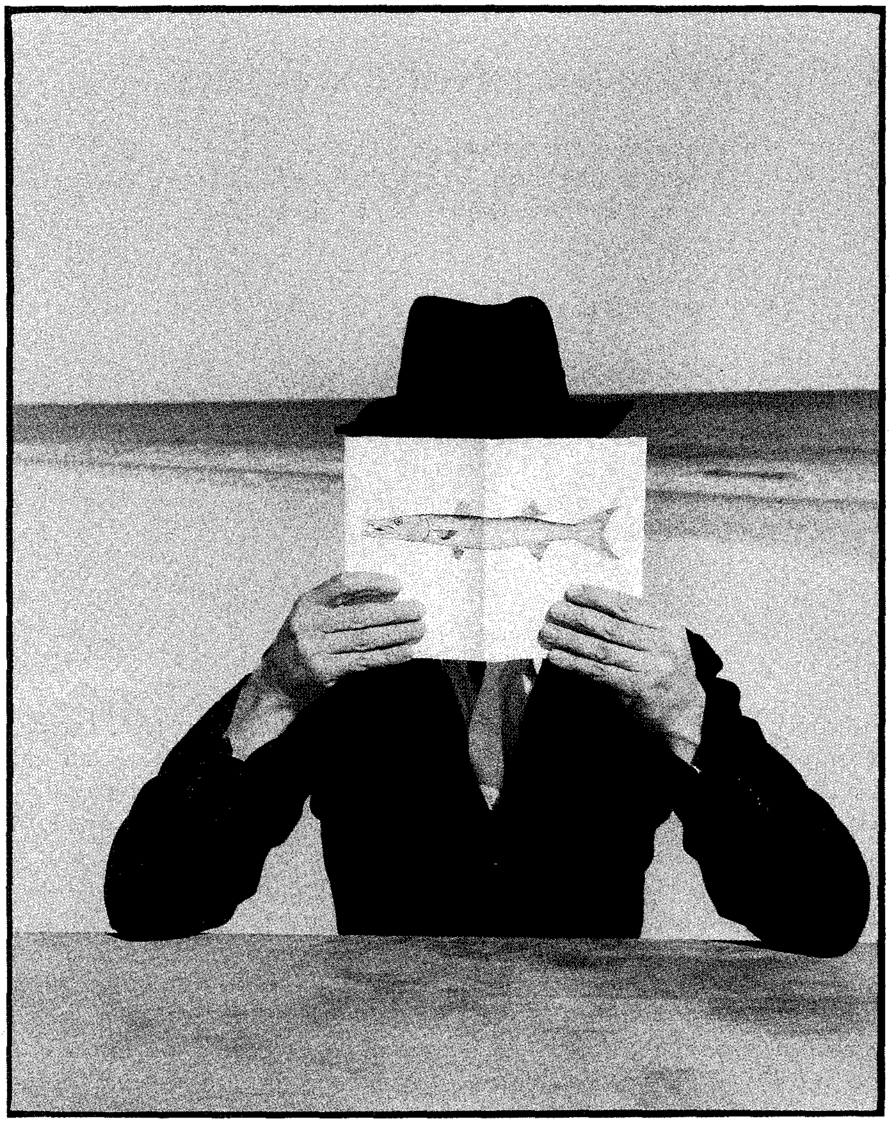
BY CALVIN TRILLIN

My friend Jeffrey Jowell, who grew up in Cape Town, has lived away from South Africa for more than forty years, yearning for snoek the entire time. He thinks about fried snoek and grilled snoek and dried snoek and snoek made into pâté. He may miss smoked snoek most of all. Any mention of snoek—a long, bony fish that looks like a second cousin of a barracuda—triggers memories in Jeffrey of his childhood, particularly of the stern interrogation of fishmongers that was part of his late mother's search for a specimen up to the standards of her dinner table. "Is it *pap*?" Emily Jowell would demand, using an Afrikaans word for soft. "Does it have worms?" I knew Jeffrey's mother. She was a small woman, but she brooked no nonsense. I can well believe that, even in the days when snoek was normally purchased from a fisherman at the dock or from somebody leading a horse-drawn cart through town, the roughest seller would have wilted when subjected to her gaze. If his snoek had been out of the water too long—snoek is an oily fish, with flesh somewhat similar to mackerel, so "too long" comes quite quickly—he might have hesitated for a moment, and then looked at the ground while admitting to Jeffrey's mother, in a remarkably soft voice for someone who had just been shouting from the middle of the street to draw attention to his wares, that it might be a bit *pap* after all. When the subject of snoek comes up these days, Jeffrey sometimes repeats his mother's questions, as a sort of mantra: Is it *pap*? Does it have worms?

It would be tempting to say that snoek is Jeffrey's madeleine, but I don't think that would give full measure to his suffering. After all, Proust, who lived in Paris, could score a madeleine any time he wanted to. Since 1970, when Jeffrey moved to London permanently, he has lived a good six thousand miles from the nearest snoek. Before that, he lived for several years in North America, at a distance from snoek waters so overwhelming that a less resilient man might have been thrown into a deep depression. Also, Proust presumably lived among people who had pleasant childhood memories of madeleines. Jeffrey has not had a similar experience in London. In the years just after the Second World War, when food shortages were still a serious problem in Great Britain—rationing lasted until 1954—canned snoek was imported from South Africa as a cheap source of protein, and, to quote a reference book called "The Encyclopedia of Southern Africa," it fell into "undeserved disfavour owing to bad canning."

I think it would be fair to point out that the word "disfavour" understates how people in England felt about canned snoek, the only sort of snoek most of them had ever eaten; they thought it was disgusting. According to a book on that period called "Snoek Piquante" (after a recipe distributed by an ever-hopeful Ministry of Food), more than a third of the canned snoek imported in 1947 was still unsold two years later. For Jeffrey to wax nostalgic about snoek among English people—particularly those old enough to have had a personal encounter with canned snoek—would be like somebody talking about his longing for creamed chipped beef on toast in the presence of people whose only experience with that dish was the version served in the mess halls of the United States Army.

When Jeffrey gets that sort of response, he can turn the conversation toward the Peppermint Crisp, a South African candy bar that few Englishmen know enough about to hold in contempt. If his wife, Frances, is not within earshot—Francie does her best to keep Jeffrey on a reasonably healthy diet—he will admit that he adores *boerewors*, the



Snoek have been described as "vicious brutes able to inflict terrible wounds."

RUVEN AFANADOR

sausage that is often tossed on the backyard grill for what Americans would call a barbecue and South Africans call a *braai.* It almost goes without saying that Jeffrey is a fancier of biltong, which is a South African version of jerky. An unfulfilled longing for biltong among South Africans living abroad is taken for granted by anyone visiting from the homeland; as the non-stop flight from Johannesburg approaches Kennedy airport, in New York, the flight attendant who is announcing items that United States customs regulations prohibit mentions meat products and then adds, "including biltong." If visitors from South Africa brought Jeffrey some biltong to London—presumably not contraband biltong, since Jeffrey is a law professor and a former law-school dean and the sort of high-test barrister known as a Queen's Counsel—he would be particularly happy to see springbok biltong, although he wouldn't turn away beef or ostrich.

Jeffrey has always had professional as well as family reasons for visiting South Africa. At times, he has gone there to attend a conference or deliver a speech. He has been a visiting professor at South African law schools. As something of an expert on constitutions—he is the United Kingdom's representative on the Venice Commission, a body that was created by the Council of Europe in 1990 to give constitutional advice to nations emerging from the dissolution of the Soviet empire—he played what he has referred to as "a very modest part" in the process that produced a constitution for the new South Africa. For one reason or another, he manages to get back to the scene of his boyhood meals more or less annually, although not always when the snoek are running. For Jeffrey, a year is a long stretch between Peppermint Crisps.

There are, of course, plenty of displaced people who suffer from nostalgia for the food they ate when they were growing up. Living in New York, I have myself, now and then, acknowledged a hankering for the barbecue of my youth, in Kansas City, Missouri; if I knew anything about constitutions and Kansas City happened to need one, I would be available in an instant. But Jeffrey's nostalgia seems especially intense, and it carries a hint of the food chauvinism that is often detectable among émigré eaters. ("Throw away your jerky," the Web site of a North Carolina purveyor of food for homesick South Africans says. "There is just no comparison to biltong!") I suppose Jeffrey would defend himself against the chauvinism charge by reminding me that he is not one of those displaced South Africans who are always going on about the wonders of Mrs. H. S. Ball's Hot Chutney, for which he has no strong feelings, and that a Chocolate Log, a candy bar that some South Africans like even better than a Peppermint Crisp, has always been something he can take or leave.

But he does tend to think that the South African version of most foodstuffs is better. I once heard him say that South African Nescafé is better than English Nescafé. He will dismiss English efforts at fish paste, or spread, while singing the praises of Peck's Anchovette, which he offered me between meals not long ago in Kalk Bay, one of a string of seashore villages that extend from Cape Town toward Cape Point. Jeffrey and his brother inherited a cottage there, and I happened to have business in South Africa while Jeffrey and Francie and their daughter, Josi, were in residence. We were eating the fish paste on some whole-grain bread. I told him that I found Peck's Anchovette unusual only in the snappy motto it carries on the label: "91 percent fish."

I also told him that I might have found a clue to the intensity of his feelings toward snoek, and its supporting cast of South African delicacies. On the plane, I'd finished reading Allister Sparks's book "Beyond the Miracle: Inside the New South Africa," in which the author writes that the inauguration of President Nelson Mandela was "the first time I felt the stirrings of a sense of national identification." For more than forty years before that, Sparks goes on to say, "I felt myself to be 'emotionally stateless': I could not identify with the land of my birth because it stood for things I abhorred; I felt no sense of pride when I heard my national anthem or saw my national flag." It's just possible, I told Jeffrey, that, given his own abhorrence of apartheid, he had settled his national identification on a long, bony fish. Jeffrey didn't appear to be engaged by this theory, judging from the fact that he didn't bother to reply. He just shrugged, and asked if I'd noticed that the bread in the Western Cape was, for some reason, the best bread in the world. "Must be some special type of grain," he said.

A POEM THAT I WROTE IN A HIGH FEVER

You who are lengthening your lives
with the best doctors and the best medicines
remember those who are shortening their lives
with the wars
that you in your long lives are not
preventing.

You who are again screwing
the younger generations
and winking at each other
the winking of your eyelids
is like the chill of the swinging shutters
in an empty house.

—*Yehuda Amichai*

(*Translated, from the Hebrew, by Leon Wieseltier.*)

The fact that this conversation took place in the Western Cape, a couple of blocks from the ocean and maybe half a mile from a pier used by fishing boats, did not mean that Jeffrey was certain to get a snoek-fix at his next meal. For one thing, snoek run in schools whose approach to the fishing grounds is not predictable. Also, although snoek is intermingled with the history and culture of the area—I read somewhere that, in the way Boston is sometimes called Bean Town, Cape Town was once referred to as Snoek Town—upmarket restaurants are unlikely to have it on the menu. The tourist brochures that sing the praises of the seafood available on the Cape tend to talk about species like Cape salmon and yellowtail and mussel-cracker and kabeljou and kingklip and white steenbras (also known, I'm happy to report, as pignose grunter) and a sort of langoustine that South Africans call crayfish. Jeffrey does not sneer at these fish, some of which engender the same sort of feelings in other displaced South Africans that snoek triggers in him. Francie Jowell's sister, Patricia Suzman, who grew up in Johannesburg and now lives in Bean Town, happened to be in South Africa while I was there, and she told me that when the immigration inspector at the Cape Town airport asked her the purpose of her visit she answered, "I am here to eat kabeljou."

The reputation of snoek when Jeffrey was a boy in the Western Cape had something in common with the reputation of catfish when I was a boy in Missouri. Partly because of the catfish's gruesome appearance and partly because of its reputation as a bottom-feeder and partly because it was cheap, it was associated with poor rural folk, and particularly with those we would have then referred to as colored people. The people who have always composed the principal nonwhite population of the Cape—mixed-race people who are mostly Afrikaans-speaking—are also called Coloreds, and they have a strong connection with snoek. Sometimes they fry it, which is what Emily Jowell usually did, and sometimes they smear it with apricot jam and then grill it, and sometimes they flake it with onions and potatoes for a dish called gesmoorde snoek. Apparently, what Cape Coloreds say in situations that would make English people say "I'm gobsmacked" is *"Slaat my dood met 'n pap snoek,"* or "Hit me dead with a soft snoek." In a South African newspaper article I came across about the reluctance of white rugby teams to socialize in the traditional post-game manner with a Colored rugby team in the Western Cape, the manager of the Colored team is quoted as saying, "When we wanted to *braai* a snoek for them, they said they don't eat snoek." One of the chefs at a terrific seafood restaurant right in Kalk Bay, a completely unpretentious place called the Olympia Cafe, said precisely that when Jeffrey and I asked him why he never featured snoek as what South African restaurant proprietors call their linefish, or catch of the day: "White people won't eat snoek."

A snoek (technically, *Thyrsites atun*) is not gruesome-looking but it does look ferocious. Apparently, it actually *is* ferocious. A book that Jeffrey has owned since boyhood, "The Sea Fishes of Southern Africa," by J. L. B. Smith, says, "Justly feared by all who deal with them, as they are vicious brutes able to inflict terrible wounds with the great fangs, the bite said to prevent coagulation of the blood." Another restaurant proprietor we spoke to about the absence of snoek on the menu told us that white people—the bulk of a pricey restaurant's clientele, even in the new South Africa—might be happy to have snoek at a *braai* in the back yard but tend to avoid it in a restaurant because they don't want to deal with all of those bones in public. I myself wouldn't mind picking out bones on the stage of a sold-out concert hall, assuming that the taste of the fish in front of me made that worth my while, but I have to admit that snoek bones are both plentiful and formidable. They are often several inches long and remarkably straight. If mice went in for the decathlon, they'd use snoek bones as javelins.

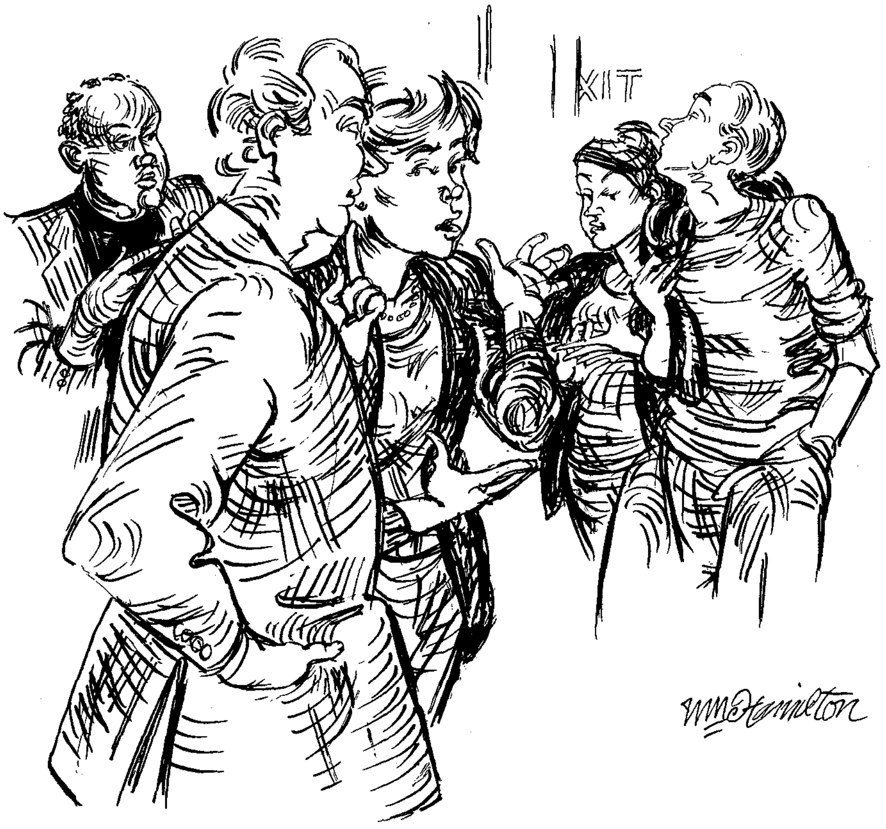
"This is not the snoek I know," Jeffrey said. He and Josi and I were on a sort of snoek tour of Cape Town, and, at about eleven in the morning, we were having a light lunch in Hout Bay, with the thought of following that with a heavy lunch somewhere else. Actually, we'd had a little snack before we got to Hout Bay, stopping at a place called the Barnyard Farmstall for some snoek pâté, which tasted particularly good when put on what Jeffrey had designated as the best whole-grain bread in the world. Hout Bay is a fishing village so identified with snoek that it stages a snoek festival every June. In fact, the place we were in is called Snoekies. It's an operation that consists of both a fish store and the sort of restaurant that requires going to the counter to place your order—a South African version of what the English call a fish-and-chips shop. The name and the atmosphere seemed right, but the fried snoek didn't have much taste, and it was covered in what Chicken Betty Lucas, the legendary Kansas City pan-fryer of chicken, used to call plaster-cast batter. I had assumed that a place called Snoekies right in Hout Bay would have satisfied Jeffrey's snoek yearnings. When it disappointed him instead, I would have said, had I mastered the phrase at the time, *"Slaat my dood met 'n pap snoek!"*

Jeffrey cheered up at Mariner's Wharf, a complex not far away, which at first glance seemed much less promising than Snoekies. Mariner's Wharf had the appearance of a place that had been built to attract tourists; it included a gift shop and a shop dealing in marine antiquities and a shop selling pearls and jewelry. In addition to a chic-looking fish market, which carried attractively boxed smoked snoek, there was a cafeteria and, on the floor above it, a waiter-service restaurant. Snoek is not served at the upstairs restaurant, but we went to the counter of the simpler place and ordered some grilled, having been warned in advance by the management that only frozen snoek was available. To our surprise, the snoek was good enough to start Jeffrey talking cheerfully about his childhood again and about his preference for Cape sole among all the soles in the world. "It's fleshier than other sole," he said. "The best!"

On the way to a highly recommended purveyor of smoked snoek, we stopped at the Grand Parade, an open space with an unobstructed view of Cape Town's elaborate city hall, right across the street, and Table Mountain behind that. We didn't have much time for the view, of course. We were bellying up to one of the Grand Parade food booths that serve, among other things, pretty good fried snoek. I took advantage of the stop to buy something I'd come across on a previous trip to Cape Town, a dosa-like object called a "salomey"—a sort of pancake filled with, in this case, chicken and potato. Jeffrey, who had never heard of a salomey, loved it. I told him to consider it a gift—not that particular salomey but the whole concept of salomies. Now, during those long English nights, he can pine for a South African food that he didn't even have as a child.

The specialist in smoked snoek was Palace Fisheries, on Lower Main Road in Salt River, a part of Cape Town that has enough older buildings with arcades to resemble a commercial district in colonial Africa. Jeffrey pointed out a storefront that had been a tailor shop where he was fitted for his first overcoat, before he left for England to read law at Oxford. The proprietor of Palace Fisheries, a self-assured man named Emanuel Dos Santos, gave Jeffrey and Josi and me a short course in the various ways of preserving snoek—how the sun and the salt spray were traditionally used to dry snoek at sea, how the oak fires are prepared for smoking snoek. He had a smoked snoek on the counter in front of him for the lesson, but when we said we wanted to buy some he said he had a piece in the back of the shop that would be preferable. Before we headed back to Kalk Bay, Josi took a picture of Jeffrey and me holding up a bag of smoked snoek in triumph in front of Palace Fisheries' shopwindow, which bore the legend "Specialist in Smoked Snoek."

When we returned to Kalk Bay with our trophy, Jeffrey told Francie that Emanuel, not content with what he had in the front of the shop, had gone in the back for our fish. We had the smoked snoek with drinks that evening, and it was delicious. "He went in back to get it," Jeffrey told Francie again. "A special piece." It occurred to me, and it may have occurred to Jeffrey, that going in the back for a special piece was the sort of thing a wise fishmonger would have done for Emily Jowell. ♦



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COOKING LESSONS

CHICKEN SMEDLEY

Fathers, sons, and food.

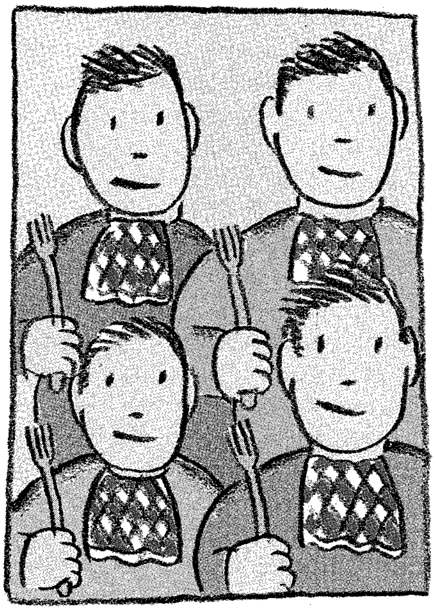
BY MARK SINGER

My father once made soup. Barley soup. This was, give or take, forty-five years ago. The soup was red, so tomatoes must have been involved—also, I'm guessing, carrots, celery, onions, a turnip, maybe some soup bones, probably garlic, plus a few impulse grabs off the spice rack. He made it on a Sunday afternoon when I was sick and in bed and, unaccountably (blizzard? tornado?), he wasn't playing golf. I have no idea what my mother, the designated chicken-noodle-soup-to-sick-children bearer, was up to that day.

Nor do I remember anything about my father's soup's medicinal value (I got well, but who knows), only that it was the best I had ever tasted. My vivid sensory memory of that gustatory episode, I think, derives from this essential ingredient: surprise. As a matter of domestic policy, Dad's self-assigned task—insuring that ample provisions were in the larder—by no means extended to preparing a meal and putting it on the table. The pot of soup was more or less the equivalent of his hole in one (a marvellous never-to-be-repeated feat that I happened to witness) and, in its own way, it struck me as more novel and improbable than that golf shot. Had he pulled a porpoise out of a top hat, I would have been approximately as impressed. The entire gesture—making the soup, delivering it to me on a tray—made me feel peculiarly worthy.

If we're keeping Oedipal score, I suppose you could say that I've outdone my father, as for twenty or so years, mostly as a single parent, I've fed my children thoughtfully prepared, well-balanced meals, rotating a quality-controlled repertoire of fifteen or twenty tasty-especially-if-you-like-garlic main courses. A woman I know, a single mom who uses her oven as a bookcase, told me recently that, not counting when she nursed her son as an infant—he's now a teen-ager—she'd never served him a home-cooked meal. Which I interpreted to mean that I deserved credit for having spared my spawn the trauma and indignity of childhoods spent eating only takeout. But to what effect, exactly?

One day last January, when the eldest of my four sons, who is now out of the house and living in urban-single-guy digs, called with an asparagus question, I thought I handled it tactfully.



SEYMOUR CHWAST

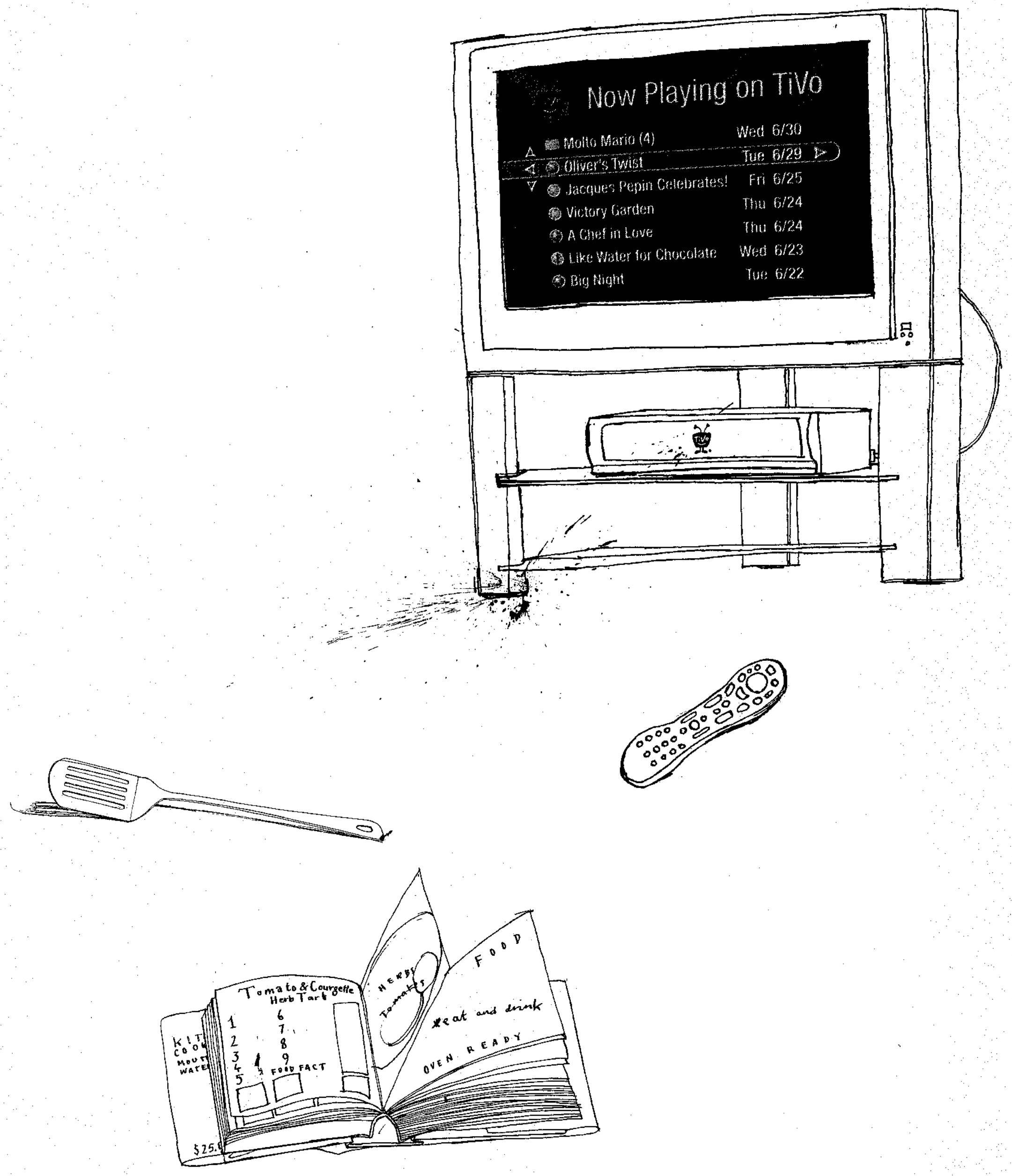
"Why would you be having asparagus when it's not in season?"

"When's the season?"

"Spring. I thought everyone knew that."

"How am I supposed to know that? You never taught me the first thing about how to cook."

He had a valid point. The truth is that I'm a bit territorial in the kitchen; I have *certain* ways of doing things and I happen to like them done in *precisely* those ways. I'm impatient with anyone who lacks an intuitive grasp of how to properly clean and chop parsley, lattice a piecrust, add just the right amount of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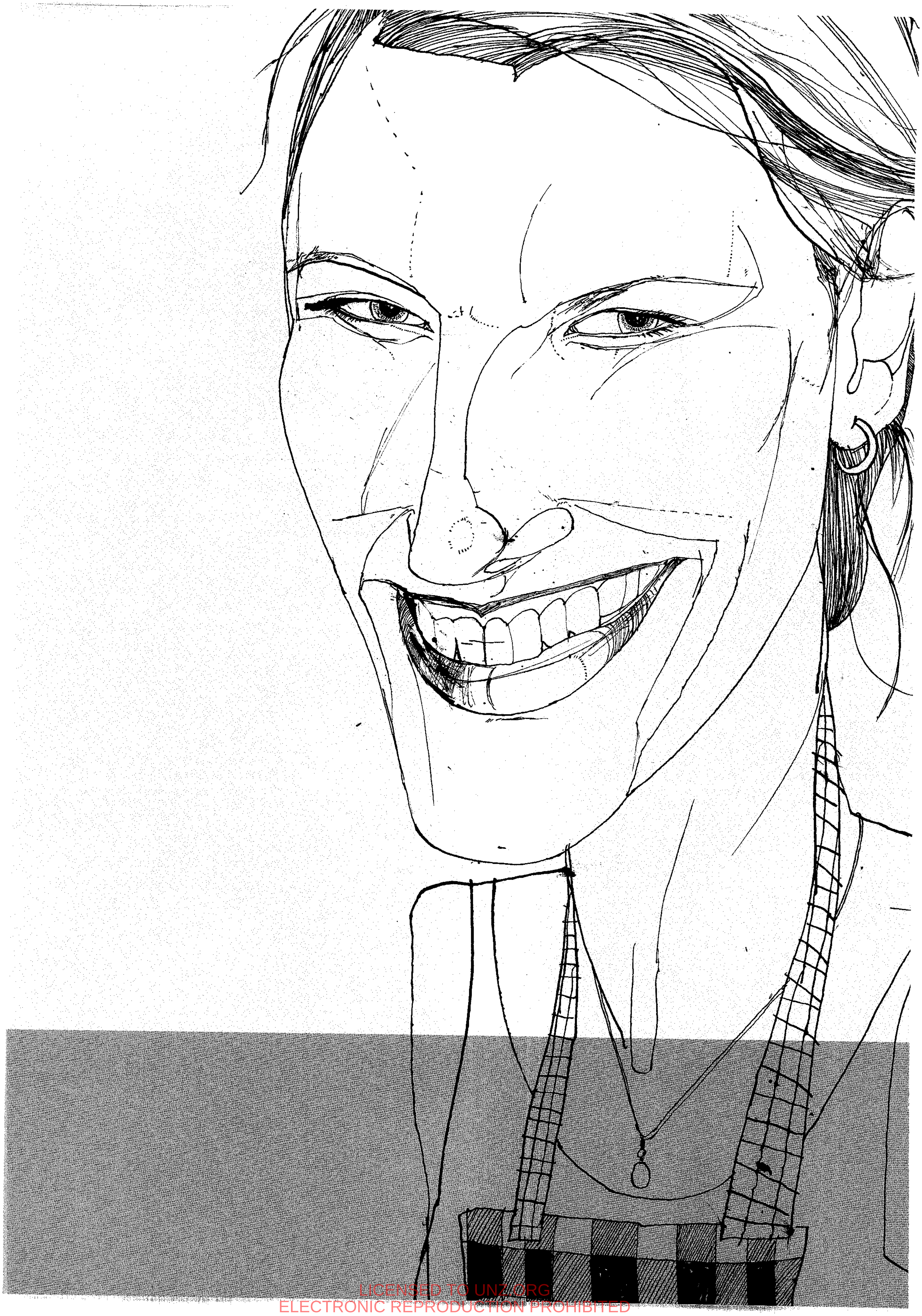

I'm no celebrity, but I have a personal chef. Sort of. A fellow foodie who, acting on my command, goes and finds anything to do with Jamie, Jacques, Mario and Nigella. So I have dozens of culinary GIANTS at my Beck AND Call, ready to assist – but on my schedule. Or, if need be, my souffle's schedule. Yeah, I may have a personal chef, but everyone knows who wears the apron in this house.

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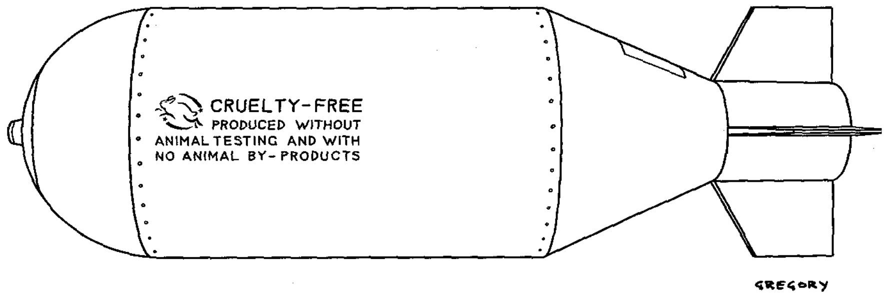

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cumin to the chili, wash a greasy skillet.

"There's a right way and a wrong way," my mother often admonished as she bossed us around her kitchen (though I've often wondered how she was able to reconcile this dogma with her habit of defrosting a couple of store-bought frozen spinach soufflés, scooping them into a cake pan, sticking it in the oven, and passing off the result as her own handiwork). For whatever reason, I embraced her credo until roughly ten minutes ago, when I confronted squarely what a lousy pedagogical example I've set. To make amends, I've chosen to reveal my darkest culinary secret: the galvanizing ingredient in Chicken Smedley, my *poulet de résistance.*

This is a never-disappointing entrée that I set out to perfect about thirty years ago in an attempt to replicate a Friday-night staple of my mother's that she called broiled chicken but was actually more baked or roasted. You cut up two three-and-a-quarter-pound chickens and arrange the pieces, skin side up, neck and giblets included, in a couple of baking dishes (one non-stick cast iron and the other CorningWare—never mind why, it's the way I do it and if you say you want to learn how to make this I'm telling you so just listen). You've already peeled two entire plum-size heads of garlic and puréed the cloves in a Cuisinart from which that spring-loaded trigger stick has detached (and which, between uses, you keep in the wicker basket in the second drawer to the right of the refrigerator). With an inch-wide wood-handled Rubbermaid spatula, you scoop the garlic into a very chipped blue-and-white enamel-coated cast-iron saucepan, whisking it with six tablespoons of melted unsalted butter (check the little measuring scale on the wrapper of the butter stick, for God's sake) and the strained juice of two large lemons. Now, about two-thirds of the way into a long paragraph, when no one is paying careful attention, you add a quarter cup of well-shaken Wishbone (no other brand!) Italian dressing. This produces a chemical reaction that turns the garlic blue-green, but no matter. The result is the Smedley sauce (there is absolutely no reason that it's called Smedley sauce, it just is), which, using a tablespoon, you spread thickly over every exposed square millimetre of chicken skin. You dust this with Lawry's seasoned salt just before it goes into the oven for fifty-two minutes at three hundred and fifty degrees—with time allotted for three removals from the oven for basting and turning purposes, this nets out to forty-seven minutes.

O.K., now you turn on the broiler to "HI" (with the wire rack in the middle position, which some cookbook writers like to refer to as "six inches" from the flame). You sprinkle the upside-down chicken with paprika (the bland cheap kind, not the hot Hungarian stuff) and brown it with the oven light on so you can see what's going on in there. *Before it gets overdone(!),* take it out of the oven, turn it, baste with the Smedley sauce, then hit it with more paprika, and back it goes into the broiler. This time you *do not avert your eyes* from the oven window. When the chicken skin is on the cusp between toasty brown and burned, you get it out of there. Repeat this with the other dish of chicken. Remove chicken pieces and place on that nice Portuguese serving platter you held on to in the property settlement. All the Smedley sauce goes into a gravy separator and only the garlic-rich bottom layer gets poured over the chicken. Do not, under any circumstances, serve this to anyone who's unwilling to eat the chicken skin. He is, trust me, unworthy. ♦

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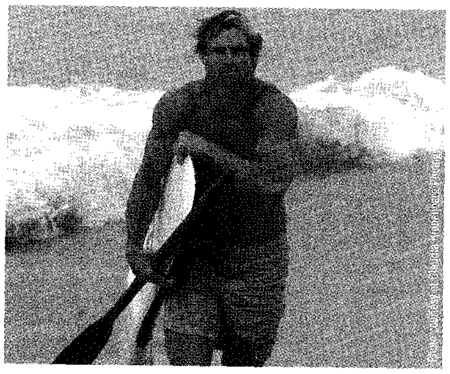

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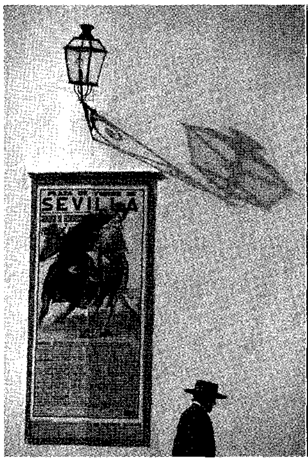


Itinerary: Europe

The Off-Season Traveler

See destinations the way they were meant to be seen and experienced. No crowds. Better service. And, better prices. Travel editor for NBC's *Today* show, Peter Greenberg, shares his insider point of view.

Imagine Venice in November. I thought I had, which is why I didn't want to go.

My friend Francesca had told me to come. I was warned it might be cold and damp. She laughed. "I cannot predict the weather," she said, "But I *can* predict how you will feel if you come. When it is off season, it is real. Venice becomes a city that embraces you in ways you could never anticipate. When you walk down the street, you can hear the echoes of your own footsteps."

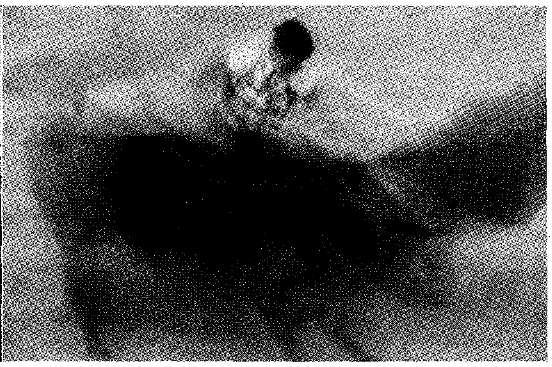
Trapped by years of unfortunate conditioning and unrealistic fears, I was still dubious. But finally I agreed, and I'm glad I did. Venice was quite cool, but it never rained once. And by dusk each evening, the late fall sun created a vibrant tableau of architecture, shadows, and history. I could look out the window of my hotel room at the Europa & Regina and take in the view that inspired Monet when he stayed there.

Francesca was right. At night, after dinner, as I walked through deserted alleyways and narrow streets, I could hear my own steps. Late one evening I found myself in St. Mark's Square. From one of the outdoor cafés I borrowed a chair and moved it to the center of the piazza. Alone in the moonlight I watched as the clouds glided in low over the Byzantine rooftops. Then, the clock struck midnight, and the peals of twelve individual bells ricocheted around me. It was a moment I knew right then I'd never forget. And I've been an enthusiastic off-season traveler ever since.

This year, Europe's off-season virtues are as compelling as ever. No queues at the British Museum in London. In Vienna, it's opera season. The beaches of the Algarve in Portugal are empty, but the sun shines, and the farmers' markets in coastal villages, like Lagos on the Atlantic, thrive. And in Spain, Andalusia's hotel rates are often a mere third of their peak-season rates.

WHEN OFF-SEASON IS SPOT ON

For many travelers from the U.S., an off-season trip starts in London, because it is often easier (and less expensive) to fly there first. With a vanguard literature festival taking place in October, visitors can explore the homes and landscapes throughout Britain that inspired literary giants like the Brontës, Chaucer, Wordsworth, and Dylan Thomas. Thought to be the oldest event of its kind in the world, the Cheltenham Festival of Literature



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(October 8–17; www.cheltenhamfestivals.co.uk) features readings, exhibitions, movies, and a book fair. It takes place in the elegant Regency spa town of Cheltenham, in the Cotswolds.

If you're lucky enough to be in London the weekend of September 18th, more than five hundred sites of special architectural and community interest (usually closed to the public) will be open for viewing. It's free of charge and not to be missed (www.londonopenhouse.org).

British Airways' peak round-trip fare of $578 is reduced to $258 mid-October to mid-December, and again post-holidays through mid-March (www.ba.com).

THE WILDS OF EIRE

I haven't forgiven one of my friends for selling his restored farmhouse in Cork last year. Nevertheless, I'm forever obliged to him for introducing me to Ireland's magical west coast. In the fall, its rocks and cliffs are in true form, solemn and misty, and tranquil enough for peaceful reflection. For solitude and spectacular views of the Irish coast, head to Kerry Way (not to be confused with the touristy Ring of Kerry) and the longest marked trail (214 km) in Ireland that begins and ends in Killarney. Warm up afterwards at Nick's Seafood & Steak on nearby Killorglin's Main Street.

If you believe in "the luck of the Irish," then be forewarned: the century-old Lisdoonvarna Matchmaking Festival (August 27–October 3; williedaly.com) is a County Clare romp hosted by Willie Daly. This local celebrity is a third-generation matchmaker in the grand old tradition of horse traders: Every market town once had at least one livestock trader who would be keeping an eye out for prospective matches. Locals still gather, some without serious expectations, for classic Irish entertainment that'll include a few pints and some great music. Fest aside, Willie offers a variety of riding tours ranging from an hour to a six-day trek along the Carraig Mountain trail.

Aer Lingus's round-trip flights, about $800 during peak season, start at $228 for midweek flights from mid-October to mid-December (www.flyaerlingus.com).

SKETCHES OF SPAIN

Bullfights, or the art of *corrida*, and the local celebrations that accompany them, give the off-season traveler a rare look at the Andalusian way of life. A bullring in the whitewashed mountain town of Ronda still exists today and hosts the Goyesque Fair in September that's inspired by the taurine works of the nineteenth-century painter (www.andalucia.com). Of the seventy bullrings in the region, Sevilla and the Plaza de Toros Maestranza are home to the fight considered the most important in Spain (www.explore-seville.com). Two great springtime festivals, Semana Santa and Feria de Abril, bring the city to life with flamenco dancing, singing, and plenty of "*el botellon*-ing" (merrymaking) in the squares.

The Bay of Cádiz on the southern coast has always been a personal favorite of mine, especially in the winter. But things really heat up just before Lent in February, because that's when Carnival in Cádiz takes place. This port town's humorous spin on the Carnival in Venice is celebrated almost exclusively by townspeople, giving off-season visitors a pure taste of local culture. Donned in elaborate masks and costumes, revelers join wild celebrations that generally succeed in disrupting all social order. The Concurso de Falla is a satirical choral song competition and a highlight of the festival held in the Gran Teatro de la Falla (www.andalucia.com/cities/cadiz.htm).

Another benefit of off-season Spain is the wide choice of paradors available (former private homes, historic castles, or even old Spanish mosques purchased by the government). One parador in Ronda sits on the four hundred-foot cliffs of the city's El Tajo river gorge and starts at 120 euros (www.paradors-spain.com).

Between September 1st and October 3rd, Air Iberia has round-trip flights from NY, Miami, and Chicago to Barcelona and Madrid starting at $471 (www.iberia.com).

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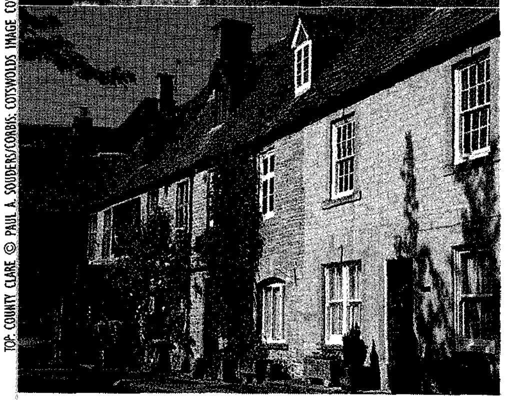

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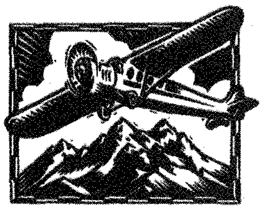

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TRUFFLE TIME

Start with an off-season food tour by car through Umbria, Italy's *cuore verde* ("green heart"). Rich with medieval hill towns and lush valleys, this often overlooked region is known for its deeply flavorful cuisine with black truffles, spit-roasted meat, and regional wines and cheeses. October and November are ideal months to visit. Perugia hosts a chocolate festival (October 16–24; www.eurochocolate.com) and Umbrian towns like Baschi and Preggio celebrate the chestnut (*castagna*) harvest in mid-October. A white truffle (*trifola*) event takes place in early November in the nearby ancient Etruscan town of Città di Castello. Oenophiles must try the regional wines of Torgiano (lungarotti.it) and the Caprai winery, both just south of Perugia. Their Sagrantino di Montefalco is considered one of the finest red wines in all of Italy (www.arnaldocaprai.it).

Then, of course, there's off-season shopping. Italy has two annual sales to make room for the upcoming season's wares—first in mid-January and again in July. In Milan or Rome, you'll save on most every purchase you make.

British Airways flies into Rome from the U.S. with fares starting at $485 compared to peak-season prices usually twice that amount (www.ba.com).

FINNISHING TOUCH

One of the best off-season experiences I ever had was when I flew into Helsinki and then headed north to Rovaniemi, whose city streets resemble reindeer antlers from aloft. With only a few hours of sunlight a day, this is Lapland at its finest (www.rovaniemi.fi). Once there, I searched for Santa Claus in a special sled pulled by a team of reindeer. Failing to locate Kringle, I upgraded to a snowmobile and camped out with the indigenous Sami. The Spa Hotel in Levi (www.hotellilevitunturi.fi) was a great way to wind down. Later, I went to Kemi and hopped on the Sampo, the world's only tourist icebreaker (www.sampotours.com), which lets you cross the frozen Gulf of Bothnia. The adventure was followed by a night's stay Inuit-style in the SnowCastle's exotic Mammut SnowHotel in Kemi (open December 31–April 3; www.snowcastle.net).

Visit Monaco this fall with guaranteed U.S. dollar rates and special travel deals at Monaco's deluxe hotels; details at **www.monacoauction.com**. Bask in the splendor of the principality and spare a little cash for a few rounds at the legendary Monte-Carlo Casino. Or indulge in an afternoon of soothing treatments at Monaco's premier seawater spa. There's a year-round calendar of events and beautiful gardens, museums like the Oceanographic Museum, and other cultural and sporting activities, when you explore **www.visitmonaco.com**.

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Back in Helsinki, I attended a Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra dress rehearsal at Finlandia Hall. Usually reserved elsewhere only for loyal subscribers, admission to rehearsals for works by such familiar names as Dvořák and Rachmaninoff, as well as contemporary Finnish composers, costs less than three dollars. Tickets are sold just before rehearsals in the hall's main foyer (www.hel.fi/filharmonia).

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(Emmy award-winning travel writer and producer Peter Greenberg is the author of "Hotel Secrets from the Travel Detective.")

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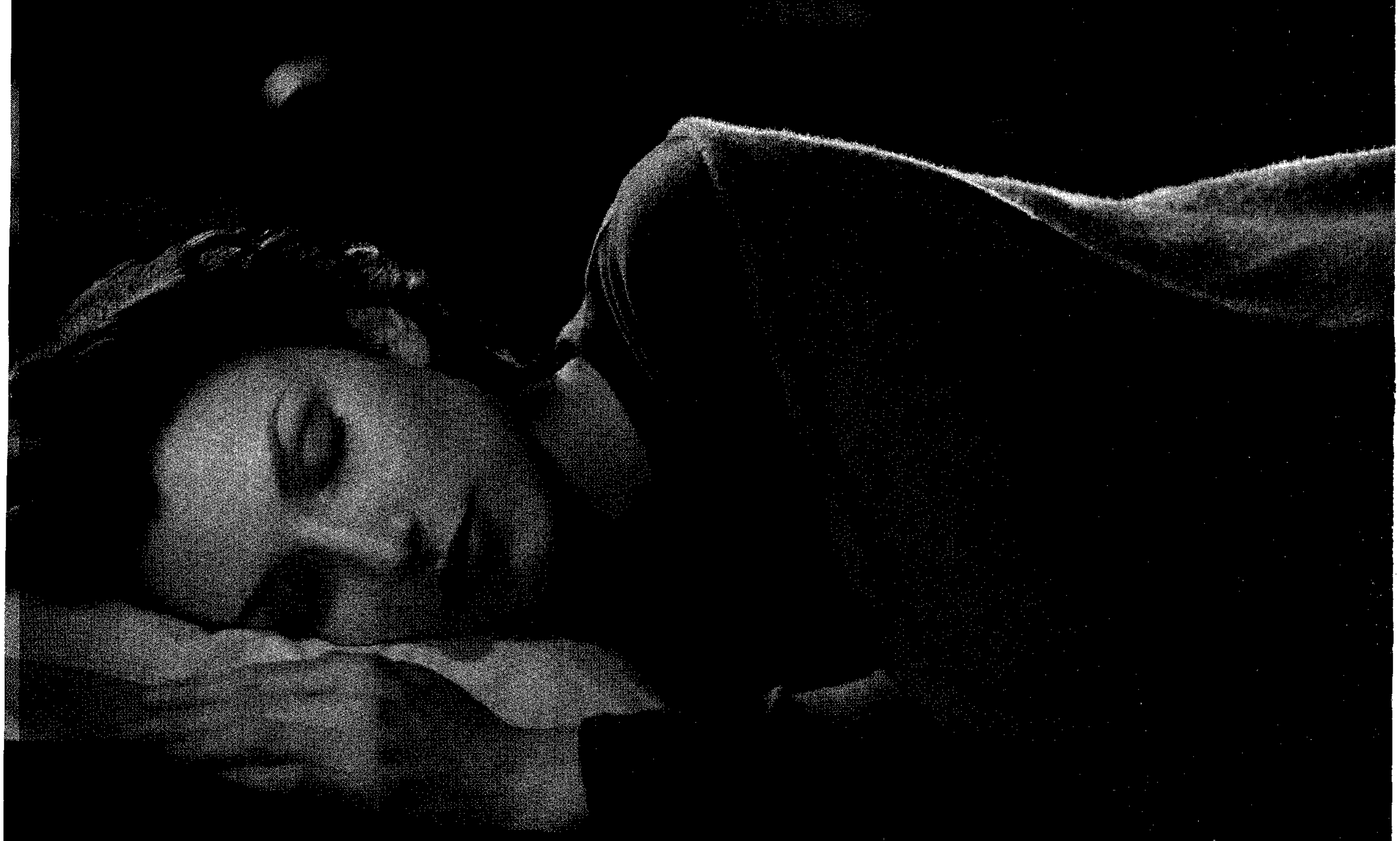

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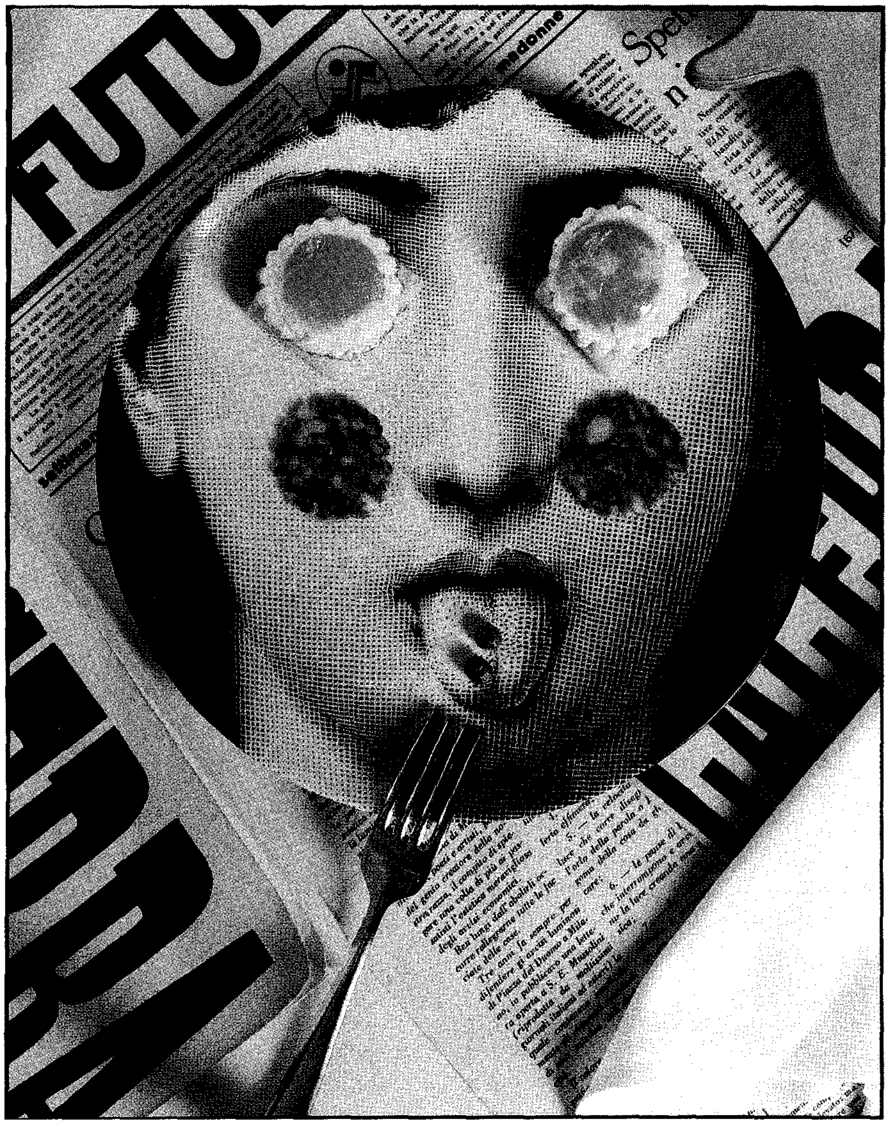
DINING OUT

BACK TO THE FUTURE

A Milanese restaurant rediscovers Marinetti's cuisine of the absurd.

BY JERRY ADLER



There are Futurist recipes for chicken stuffed with ball bearings and salami in cologne.

RUVEN AFANADOR

Lacerba, Monica Trapasso thought when she saw the sign above the pizzeria she had just bought, was a peculiar name for a restaurant. It is not even a word in Italian, although *acerbo* is an adjective, meaning unripe or sour, applied to fruit. But the space was suitable for the neighborhood trattoria that she wanted to open with her brother Angelo and her boyfriend, Marco Pagano: a few low-ceilinged rooms in a former stable on a short, narrow street in Milan, near a bakery and a glass-blower's shop. Trapasso, who is in her mid-thirties, with brown eyes and dark glossy hair that falls in waves to her shoulders, is an architect, but she comes from a restaurant-owning family in Calabria; Pagano, a tall, earnest man in his thirties who wears wire-rimmed glasses, is the managing director of an employment agency. One day in the early summer of 2000, soon after the sale closed, Trapasso went with some friends to Venice to visit the white palazzo on the Grand Canal that houses the American philanthropist Peggy Guggenheim's collection of modern art. In the museum she saw a Picasso collage from 1914 titled "Pipe, Glass, Bottle of Vieux Marc," which included the large, blocky letters of a newspaper banner from that period. The newspaper's name was *Lacerba*. Maybe, she said to Pagano when she called him that evening, it's a better name than we thought.

The newspaper was a mainstay of one of the minor glories of Italian culture, the artistic movement known as Futurism. In painting, sculpture, and poetry, Futurism celebrated the early decades of the twentieth century in all its mechanical clangor and soul-stirring violence. Its guiding spirit for more than thirty years, the poet Filippo Marinetti, wrote, in his Futurist manifesto of 1909, that "we will sing of the vibrant nightly fervour of arsenals and shipyards blazing with violent electric moons; greedy railway stations that devour smoke-plumed serpents; factories hung on clouds by the crooked lines of their smoke." By the time of his death, in 1944, when the real shape of the future being forged in those arsenals had become horrifyingly evident, he and his colleagues had produced dozens of manifestos on a wide range of topics, some experimental writing, and a considerable body of abstract painting and sculpture. As Trapasso began researching Futurism, she discovered that Marinetti had also written a cookbook, "La Cucina Futurista," published in 1932. The food of the future, as Marinetti envisaged it, would ban spaghetti but include smoked camel meat, raw-onion ice cream, and fried trout stuffed with nuts and wrapped in liver. It marked a whole new way of thinking about food: the cuisine of the absurd.

That premise, on the face of it, might not seem promising for a restaurant. At first, Trapasso thought she'd just add some Futurist touches to the décor. It was her Milanese chef, Pino Carvelli, who came up with the idea of trying to make something palatable from Marinetti's recipes. It took months of experimentation, be-

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cause "La Cucina Futurista" doesn't have recipes in the modern sense—just lyrical descriptions of the ingredients and the effects that they are meant to create. Actually, it doesn't have "recipes" at all. Instead of the old-fashioned *ricetta*, Marinetti preferred the pseudoscientific term *formula*, which is the same in Italian as in English. The formula for "Carneplastico" ("Sculpted Meat"), "a synthetic interpretation" of the Italian landscape, calls for a "large cylindrical rissole of minced veal stuffed with eleven different kinds of cooked vegetables." About cocktails, however, the cookbook is pedantically precise. Drinks such as "Devil in a Black Key" (two parts orange juice to one each of grappa and melted chocolate, garnished with a hard-boiled egg yolk) and "Fire in the Mouth" (whiskey, honey, vermouth, Strega, and cherries coated with cayenne pepper) seem designed to remind us that, in Italian as in English, *rivoluzionario* ("revolutionary") is cognate with *rivoltante* ("revolting").

When the new Lacerba opened, later that summer, it became the world's second Futurist restaurant. Its only known predecessor is the Holy Palate, in Turin, which was open for roughly a year in the early thirties and which "La Cucina Futurista" describes as "a huge cube-shaped box . . . adorned with entirely luminous, semi-colourless columns and large metallic eyes, also luminous, embedded halfway up the wall; and this, finally, is covered with the purest aluminum from the ceiling to the floor." By now, Carvelli has mastered more than two dozen dishes from the cookbook, which he offers as a four-course Futurist menu that changes weekly. Lacerba also has a traditional menu of pasta, meat, and fish dishes. The two menus create what a marketing consultant would call synergy: most people order a Futurist dish the first time they come, Pagano says, and the traditional menu gives them something to eat when they return. Lacerba catered a Futurist dinner last winter at the Italian Cultural Institute on Park Avenue, the first such event in the United States since 1993, when the Italian department at U.C.L.A. sponsored one. During his visit to New York, Pagano sought advice from the owners of Italian restaurants about opening a branch of Lacerba in the city. He was told that the fad for low-carbohydrate diets was affecting business at all Italian restaurants. "I'm not sure New Yorkers are ready for it," he concluded.

Lacerba is a bustling place, filled, most nights, with casually dressed young families and couples. A four-course meal, Futurist or traditional, typically costs around thirty-six euros per person. Framed Futurist documents and photographs of the perpetually glowering Marinetti—stocky, balding, and belligerently mustachioed—hang from the walls. The menus, bound with two thick bronze machine screws and hex-head nuts, evoke the famous "bolted book," designed by the Futurist artist Fortunato Depero in 1927. Angelo Trapasso, Monica's brother, is the maître d'; he is tall, with curly hair, and wears a yellow-and-red zigzag vest, after a Depero waistcoat from the nineteen-twenties.

The Futurist menu at Lacerba is not for the faint of heart. One rainy night last April when I had invited Trapasso and Pagano to join me, I was served an appetizer that consisted of two upright skewers impaling dried figs and olives, anchored in a thick slice of banana and crowned with tentacles, which, puckered with tiny suckers, sprouted from iridescent lumps of cuttlefish. The plate was garnished with an undulating pattern of tomato and spinach purées, from which the dish takes its name: "Italian Sea." The recipe was a variation on one in "La Cucina Futurista" which included cherries. It was credited to the Futurist artist Fillía (1904-36). After Marinetti's 1929 manifesto on "Aeropainting," announcing "an absolutely new reality" based on the perspectives of powered flight, Fillía proclaimed himself an Aeropainter, and began specializing in abstract cityscapes from the cosmic perspective, in works like "Idol of the Sky" and "Divinity of Aerial Life."

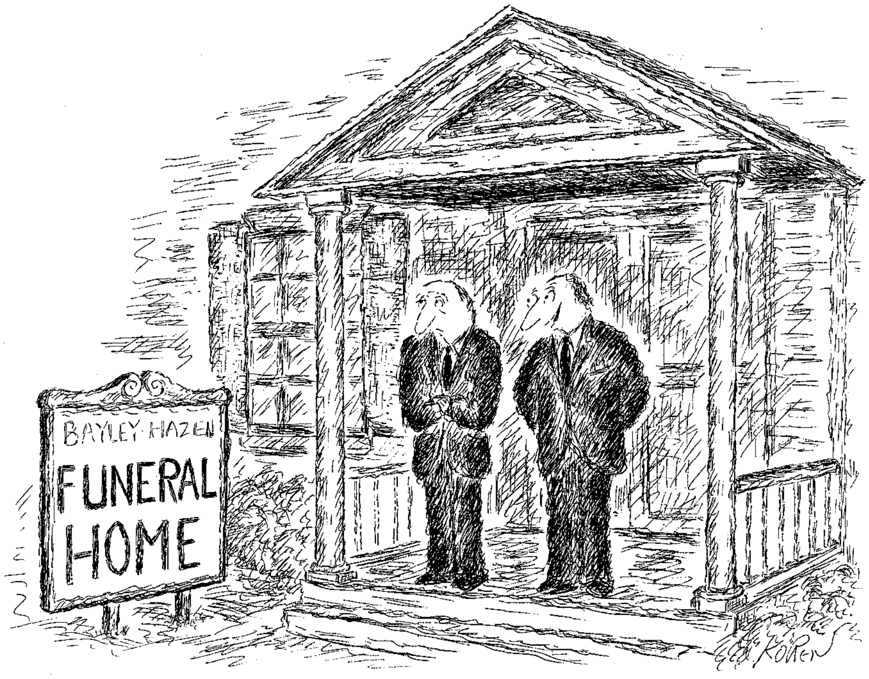
This dish anticipated by decades the vogue in fashionable restaurants for cantilevered towers of food and precious painterly applications of sauce and unfamiliar pairings of ingredients. Pagano enthusiastically set to eating his portion while watching expectantly for my reaction. I asked for another glass of prosecco.

Bourgeois incomprehension, or even disgust, was precisely the reaction that Futurism sought. Marinetti, born in 1876 to an Italian family in Alexandria, Egypt, and educated there and in Paris, settled in Italy at the turn of the century to study law. He was thirty-two when his founding manifesto was printed on the front page of *Le Figaro*—an extraordinary coup for an unknown Italian poet, which he is said to have pulled off by romancing the daughter of one of the owners. Bombastic, self-dramatizing, and neurotically energetic, he earned the nickname "the caffeine of Europe." The grandeur of his prose disguised the fact that in 1909 Futurism was a movement of one. But just a year later, when five Italian artists—the best known was Umberto Boccioni—signed the "Manifesto of the Futurist Painters," pledging to "sweep the whole field of art clean of all themes and subjects which have been used in the past," Marinetti had, in effect, willed an artistic movement into being.

Prompted by Marinetti, the artists positioned themselves at the leading edge of the avant-garde. Marinetti, who was independently wealthy, paid for Boccioni, Luigi Russolo, and Carlo Carrà to visit Paris in 1911 and study the work of the Cubists, in preparation for a Futurist show there the following year. The Futurists adapted the techniques of Cubism to their violent aesthetic, fracturing the visual plane into ever-smaller pieces and running jagged lines through them. Compared with the puce pinwheels of Giacomo Balla's "Abstract Speed + Sound," Braque's wine bottles and pipes look positively placid. Marinetti advanced a concept he called "simultaneity"; in painting, this was conveyed by depicting the same subject in different aspects as it moved across the canvas. Duchamp's "Nude Descending a Staircase" is often considered a major influence on Futurist painting—although Marinetti, presumably, would have preferred her hurtling down the steps on a motorcycle. In his own work, Marinetti sought to free language from the tyranny of syntax and the deadweight of useless parts of speech, a category that included all adjectives and adverbs. His "Words in Liberty," as he called his poems, erupted onto the page in a jumble of typefaces and colors, a burst water main of images and ideas. Caroline Tisdall and Angelo Bozzolla's authoritative history of the movement, "Futurism" (1977), begins its chapter on music with the observation "Noise was Futurism's contribution to music."

If Futurism today lacks the cachet of Cubism and Surrealism, it is partly an accident of geography. The Futurists were in Italy, outside the intellectual capital of Europe and unknown to most rich American collectors, and they never had a genius like Picasso. (They came closest, perhaps, in Boccioni, whose masterpiece, an abstract, striding figure in bronze, "Unique Forms of Continuity in Space," conveys an electrifying sense of motion and vitality.) But perhaps more important in insuring the movement's obscurity were the impassioned politics of its leader. Marinetti, who memorably glorified war as "the world's only hygiene," stridently attacked the government of Italy for its reluctance to enter the First World War. At his direction, marchers donned "anti-neutralist" suits in clashing colors and jagged patterns to urge Italy to join the continental slaughter. (It was an idea he borrowed from Balla, who had designed men's suits in swirls of sky blue and pink to mock the passéist tradition of neutral grays.) When Italy eventually entered the war, in 1915, Marinetti and a number of his cohorts enlisted. Boccioni died after falling from his horse, and several other Futurists were killed in battle, and the movement never regained the artistic energy that it had enjoyed in its first exhilarating years.

By the end of the war, Marinetti was espousing political views that were complicated even in the context of his own time, and are virtually incomprehensible today. He was an anarchist in rebellion against tradition, the authority of the Church, and the monarchy; he was a totalitarian who sought to dictate, in the "Futurist Manifesto of the Italian Hat," even what Italians wore on their heads (his recommended materials include cork, glass, sponge, and neon tubing). Although he was married to the serenely beautiful Benedetta Cappa from 1923 until his death,



"This will lighten your mood, Dick—every few minutes, a baby boomer turns fifty."

"The apple bob was tricky—I like the way you handled yourself."

• •

he denounced the institution of marriage as "legal prostitution." He had a long and tortuous relationship with Mussolini, whose chauvinism Marinetti's nearly matched. The two became friends and were arrested together in a pro-war demonstration as early as 1915, and for several years thereafter Futurists made common cause with Mussolini's party. In 1919, Marinetti, Mussolini, and Arturo Toscanini all ran on the Fascist ticket for parliament. They were trounced. As Fascism moved to the right in the next few years, Marinetti broke with Mussolini, but they were later reconciled. In his sixties, he rushed to enlist in the new war that Mussolini had entered, volunteering for the Russian front. His reckless act may have hastened his death, of a heart attack, toward the end of the war, and it certainly damaged his reputation. Historians have only recently rediscovered him, a development that both pleases and amuses a leading Marinetti scholar, Luigi Ballerini, of U.C.L.A. "His books are coming out now in academic editions, filled with footnotes," Ballerini says, "which is exactly what he hated when he was alive."

Marinetti's nationalism took a distinctive form, dictated by his obsession with modern technology. Italy, he believed, was destined to lead the world into a future of fast cars, airplanes, and machine guns. He found it humiliating that his compatriots continued to inhabit the agrarian past, especially when they sat down at the table. In 1891, the first modern Italian cookbook, "Science in the Kitchen and the Art of Eating Well," had been compiled by a well-travelled dilettante named Pellegrino Artusi. The book—which was published in a new English edition last year—was steeped in the culture that Marinetti abhorred, of peasant dishes such as "capon cooked in a bladder" and of cozy encouragement to host a dinner for friends "to get their mustaches greasy." In 1930, Marinetti wrote a manifesto on Futurist cuisine, demanding a new form of nutrition for the new Italian man. Eventually, he wrote, this diet might consist entirely of pills, thus minimizing the distraction from the pursuit of military glory; for now, it could take the form of a chicken stuffed with ball bearings, meant not to be eaten but to flavor the meat with the fortifying taste of steel. And, in a masterstroke of publicity, Marinetti took on the quintessential food of his homeland. "Since everything in modern civilization tends towards elimination of weight and increased speed, the cooking of the future must conform to the ends of evolution," he wrote. The first step would be the renunciation of pasta.

The response to this radical proposal must have been gratifying to someone with Marinetti's taste for obloquy. "ASSAILS MACARONI AS BANE OF ITALY" was the headline in the *Times* on January 4, 1931. Editorials denounced him, and he responded zestfully: when the mayor of Naples declared vermicelli with tomato sauce the food of the angels, Marinetti retorted that it merely proved the monotony of life in Paradise. He bolstered his arguments with scientific-sounding factoids that he appeared to have manufactured on the spot. "Pastasciutta, 40% less nutritious than meat, fish or pulses," he begins one passage, setting a specious tone of reasoned argument, "ties today's Italians with its tangled threads to Penelope's slow looms and to somnolent old sailing ships in search of wind." He quoted the observation of "a highly intelligent Neapolitan Professor, Signorelli," that pasta is swallowed without chewing, thereby escaping the digestive effects of saliva. In Signorelli's view, for which he cites no research, the effects on the pancreas and liver promoted the gravest of ills: "lassitude, pessimism, nostalgic inactivity and neutralism."

Marinetti observed that macaroni led to "weight, big bellies [and] obesity," but seemed not to grasp why, because he advocated rice as a substitute. Perhaps he regarded risotto as a more fitting dish for a race of warriors than macaroni because Milan, a center of Futurist activity, is in the rice belt of northern Italy. He was no doubt also influenced by the fact that, in the early nineteen-thirties, the Italian government was in the midst of its own campaign to promote rice in the name of self-sufficiency. Italy had to import wheat for its pasta, but it grew its own rice. A Futurist meal was an intellectual and moral exercise: with every mouthful, you affirmed your membership in the new urban society.

Marinetti was delighted to have so outraged the housewives of Aquila, a town near Rome, that they circulated a petition demanding the right to continue to cook pasta for their families. But Futurist food was never something that a housewife was likely to put on the table. It would take an ambitious hostess to tackle a dish that called for watermelon, radicchio, Parmesan and Gorgonzola cheese, caviar, figs, and cookies, "all arranged neatly on a large bed of mozzarella, to be eaten, eyes closed, letting one's hands wander here and there, while the great painter and words-in-liberty poet Depero recites his famous song, 'Jacopson.'" Futurist food was served at the Holy Palate restaurant and at Futurist banquets, many of which are recounted in detail in "La Cucina Futurista." There was a banquet in Paris, at which Josephine Baker was said to have performed, and which included on the menu both "Steel Chicken" and "The Excited Pig"—a salami propped upright in a puddle of black coffee and cologne. (The recipe doesn't specify what kind of cologne.) There was a banquet at Chiavari, where "the head of a newborn calf, miserable and disconcerted," was served with pineapple and anchovy-stuffed dates, an "appetizer perhaps too poetic to be appreciated by the needs of the stomach, which as everyone knows is a crude materialist."

Only someone of Marinetti's peculiar genius could have written a cookbook so frankly disdainful of "the needs of the stomach." Futurist cooking juxtaposed flavors, colors, and textures in ways meant to provoke, to challenge, and occasionally, as Marinetti acknowledged, to be left on the plate with a shudder.

I never found out what kind of cologne goes with salami, because that is one dish Carvelli hasn't yet figured out. In compiling his menu for Lacerba, he has excised anything that a reasonable twenty-first-century diner would reject out of hand. One of his more successful dishes is the "Cotoletta Tennis," a large flat veal chop with tomato sauce and creamy mascarpone arranged in a checkerboard pattern reminiscent of the strings on a tennis racquet. It tastes like an experimental version of veal parmigiana, made by someone who hasn't learned that the point of the dish is the interplay of the sweetish sauce and the salty cheese. In other dishes, though, the contrasts are jarring: the "Placafame" ("Hunger-Stopper") is an appetizer composed of pineapple slices enfolding prosciutto, mushrooms, tuna, and anchovies. Romy Golan, an art historian at CUNY Graduate Center, believes that Marinetti's fondness for exotic tropical fruits signified his ambitions for Italy to possess a colonial empire, but that does not explain the cookbook's inordinate fondness for anchovies, which are ubiquitous in everything but desserts. I was relieved one night to come to the conclusion of my meal: two voluptuous mounds of ricotta made pink and bittersweet with Campari, a dessert that goes by the name "Strawberry Breasts."

Even "Italian Sea" proved to be edible, once I settled on a plan for eating it. My approach was to disimpale each component and eat the pieces one at a time at long intervals, washed down with a generous mouthful of prosecco. I was violating the Futurist spirit of the dish, which was obviously meant to embody the concept of simultaneity. The combination of olives, mollusks, and banana subverted the middlebrow convention of a linear progression of a meal from piquant to bland to sweet. My defense is that I live in the very future that Marinetti idealized, and have had to put up with far more velocity and conflict than his fondest dreams allowed.

There was a revolution coming, but Marinetti didn't see it, and, from his vantage point in Italy in the nineteen-thirties, probably couldn't have imagined it. The future belonged not to the Aeropoets declaiming over figs and mozzarella but to McDonald's and Archer Daniels Midland. The factories and dynamos that the Futurists so admired gave birth to industrial food, which expresses its own ideology of efficiency and growth. Would the drive-through burger joint have seduced him with its energy and speed or repelled him with its bourgeois ordinariness? The latest culinary movement to emerge from Italy embraces a philosophy and a name that Marinetti would have reviled. It's the backlash against hamburgers that goes by the name Slow Food. ♦

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PERSONAL HISTORY

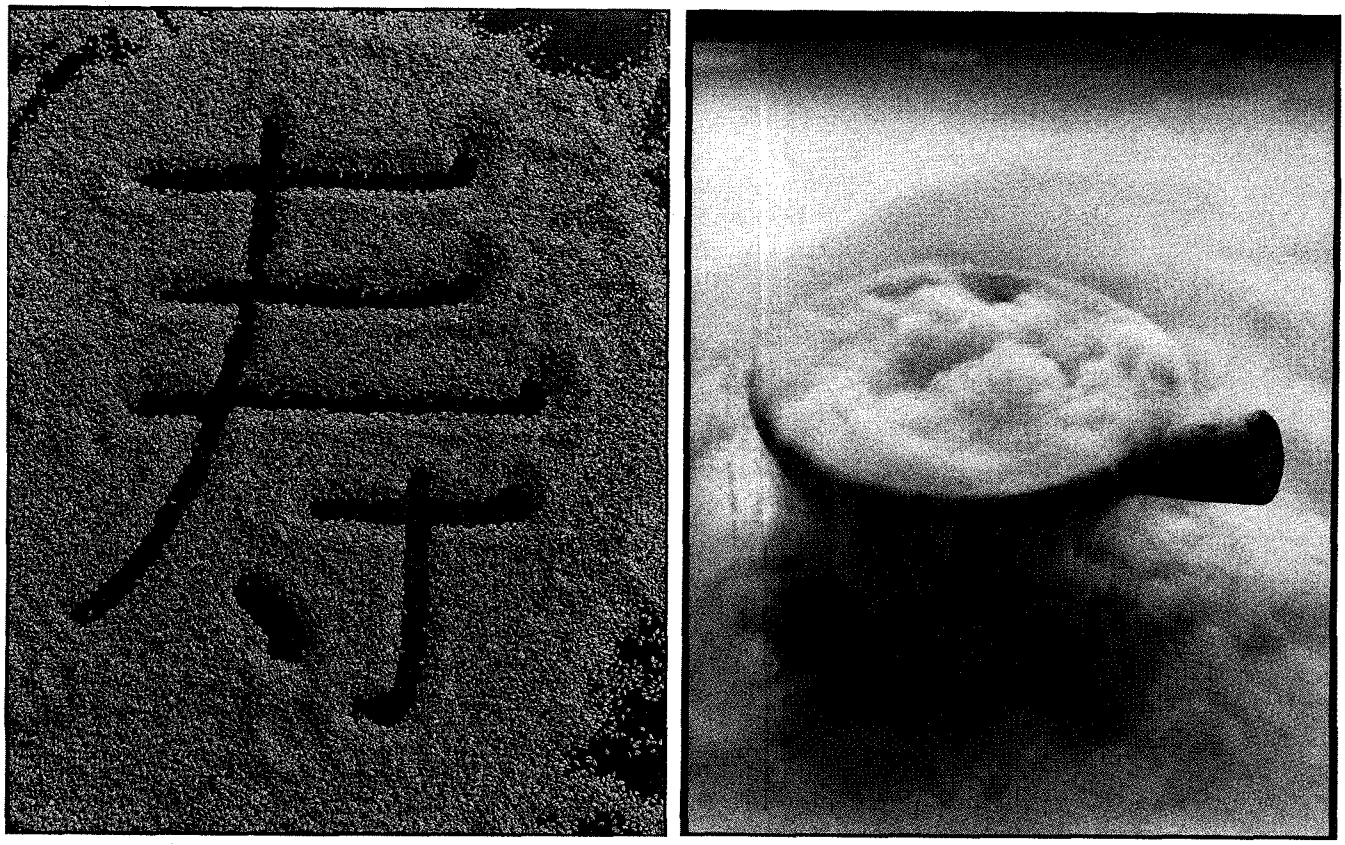
THE MAN WHO EATS

What my grandfather taught us about hunger.

BY YIYUN LI

The God of Lightning does not hit the man who eats, my grandfather often said when we were young. The lesson? Eating was a virtue. Grandpa could go on for hours citing Confucius and his disciples on the merit of eating. Sometimes, to make us appreciate food more, he told my sister and me hunger stories. A poor scholar went to a banquet and saw sesame seeds scattered on the table. "Let me teach you calligraphy," the man said to the guests, after which he licked his forefinger and wrote like a master on the table, cleaning up the sesame seeds as he went. A poor man from a village visited a rich friend in the city, according to another story, and the friend invited him to a fancy restaurant, ordered a cup of tea, and asked him politely to help himself to all the good smells. Grandpa also told us tales about a famine in the fourteenth century, when neighbors traded their children so they would not have to cook their own sons and daughters. They started with the youngest in the families, Grandpa explained, because the little ones knew nothing and would not be afraid.

The last story both frightened and enchanted me. Throughout my childhood, food was always in short supply and rationing was never-ending, but famine, a word with a dangerous appeal, was a mystery. I was about four years old when my grandfather first told me the story, and, as the youngest, I imagined my parents trading me for the boy next door. He was my age but bigger and fatter—a good deal, then, for my family. Knowing that I would be the one sacrificed in a time of famine, I felt important, grown-up, and sad. I studied the tins of crackers and cookies that Grandpa kept on top of his bookcase and wondered if I deserved a treat because of what I would do for the family. Grandpa shared a bedroom with my sister and me. Our room was about a hundred square feet. It had two beds and the furniture that Grandpa had brought from his previous residence: a sturdy desk and a big wooden bookcase. If I stood on the edge of the double bed that my sister and I shared, it would take only a small hop for me to land on Grandpa's single bed; I could then climb onto the desk from his headboard, and from there it would be easy to reach the tins on the top shelf. But we were not allowed to take the hop to start the intrusion. Everything Grandpa owned was too precious for us to touch. On his desk were brushes of all sizes, an inkstone, a stack of rice paper for painting and calligraphy, a bronze paperweight and a marble one, and a lamp with a bridge and a pavilion exquisitely carved into the base; in his bookcase, the books were brittle and yellow, bound with strings that had come loose. The only unbreakable objects were the cracker tins, and the bags of gourmet pickles, also kept out of our reach, that he bought on



Anything that wasn't rationed became a treat. My sister drank soy sauce from the bottle; I sipped vinegar.

monthly trips to an expensive store. He ate his snacks alone.

When Grandpa was in a good mood, he taught us to recite poems written during the Tang dynasty, between the seventh and the tenth century. Once in a while, he sneaked his own poems into the curriculum and gave us each an animal cracker whenever we memorized his work. My sister, who was four years older, taught me to put the cracker in a glass of water to make it grow. Together, we watched the rooster or the elephant become fat, and then we scooped it out carefully with a spoon. Sometimes we were too greedy and let the crackers stay in the water too long; at the first touch of the spoon the cracker would disappear, a phenomenon that puzzled me for the longest time during my childhood.

On Sunday afternoons, my parents often had to take part in required parades—my father, who was a physicist, with his research institute, and my mother, a teacher, with her school. It was the middle of the nineteen-seventies, toward the end of the Cultural Revolution, and it seemed that there was always a parade on Sunday in those years, to celebrate a new policy of the Party, or the recent publication of a poem of Chairman Mao's. Sometimes the call for a parade came on a weeknight, and it would last until the small hours of the morning. My parents spent little time with me during the week, and I was expected to be in bed not long after I got out of day care. On weekends, however, their absence meant that I had to stay with Grandpa. On one such afternoon, my sister and I woke from a long nap, our limbs heavy with hunger and despair: the early dusk of winter had settled in. The marching tunes from the street were loud and distant at the same time. The central heating for the apartment building wouldn't be turned on until after suppertime. Grandpa sat by the lamp and read, the shadow of his head big on the wall. My sister and I held hands under the blankets, and could not get up. Even now, the dim and useless hours before supper on winter afternoons depress me.

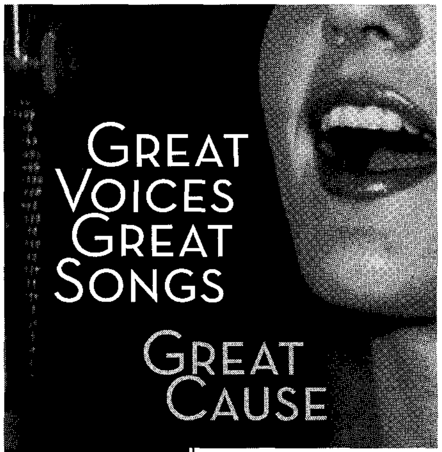
Eventually, Grandpa realized that my parents would not be back for some time, and we were all hungry. He went into the kitchen and after a few minutes he returned to the bedroom with a bowl of soup for himself and a bowl for us. The soup was made with a pot of boiling water, two scoops of lard, and a spoonful of soy sauce; it arrived with floating oil drops, golden with shining rims in the orange lamplight. My sister and I hurried out of bed and blew on the soup carefully to cool it. The oil drops swam in happy circles, and life, suddenly, was as good as a cracker in water, swelling with hope.

RUVEN AFANADOR

My grandfather was born in 1897, the only son of a silk and fabric merchant in a small town near Shanghai. His parents, who were relatively wealthy and very farsighted, sent him to both an old-fashioned Chinese school to learn to write poetry—the most important education for any learned man—and a Western-style middle school and high school, still a rarity in the early years of the twentieth century, and far beyond the requirements of the heir to a fabric shop. When he graduated from high school, he became one of the few intellectuals in his home town, and taught at a boys' school for a few years. When he was in his early twenties, he went to Shanghai to seek a career in publishing. He passed a series of exams to become an apprentice in the Commercial Press of Shanghai, one of the first Western-style publishing houses in China. When we were young, he liked to brag about the competitiveness of the exams. In his version of the story, one young man whom he beat was Lu Xun, who later became one of the country's most famous writers. Lu Xun had to become a writer, Grandpa claimed, because there were no other opportunities for him in publishing.

Grandpa married his first wife around the time he moved to Shanghai, but she soon died in an inexplicable manner: she hanged herself a few days after giving birth to her first child. An old acquaintance from his home town heard the news and cabled him, offering his younger sister, the most beautiful of nine siblings, as a wife. My grandfather married her, and she became my grandmother.

Of the few early pictures I have of him, the oldest is a yellowed passport photograph, taken in the nineteen-thirties. He is wearing a suit and tie, and glasses with round lenses, and he has an expression of aloofness, or perhaps of arro-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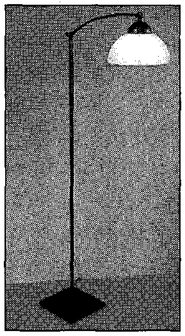
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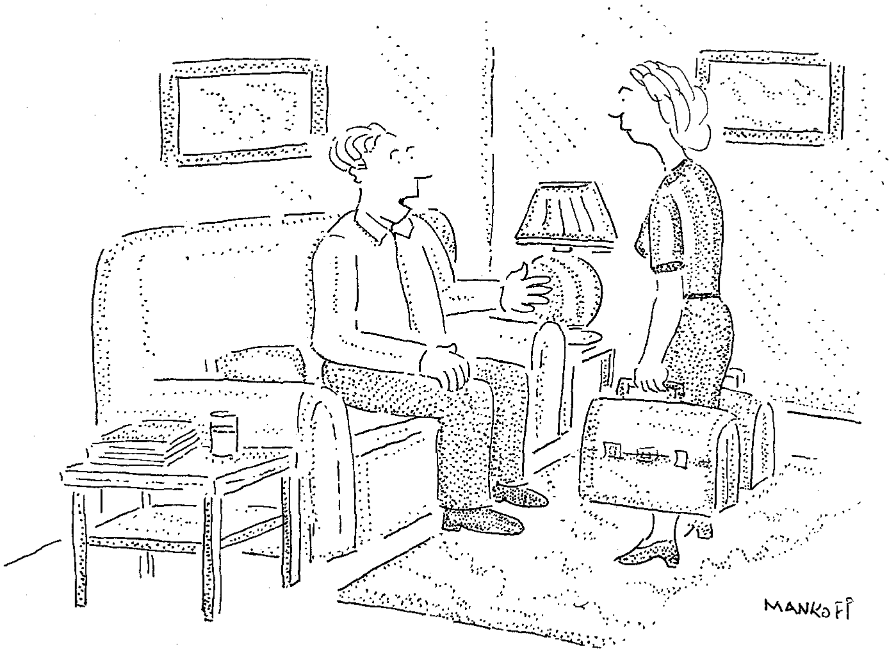


"O.K., leave me, but just remember, if you do I'm coming with you."

• •

gance. He had ascended to an editor's position by then, and he was in the prime of his life. When I was a child, our relatives from the South described him as a man with a thin, gilded walking stick in one hand and a fedora in the other. Sometimes he spoke English to his fellow-citizens; he enrolled his younger boy in a healthy-baby contest sponsored by a company that imported expensive dairy products from Britain, and when the baby won a large picture of him was printed in the newspaper ads; he took his family to overnight mahjongg parties and let his three sons fall asleep in a heap in the guest room, while he played rounds and won money. For a few years, he and his family lived in luxury. His parents' shop was no longer a lure for him to return to his home town.

Then his luck changed. The child who had won the healthy-baby contest died of diphtheria, and my grandmother, at the sight of her son's body, went crazy. A year later, she gave birth to her last baby—my mother—but she never regained her sanity.

Soon, the Japanese invasion drove them out of Shanghai. My grandfather joined the Kuomintang—the Nationalist People's Party—and served in the Army as an advisory staff member. He took his family with him from province to province, never settling down long enough to make a home. He sent his two sons to military academies. By the time they graduated, the Second World War was over, and the Communists were the enemy. The three of them fought in the civil war on the Kuomintang side from 1945 to 1949, and lost to Mao's army. His older son retreated with the Army to Taiwan; he and his younger son surrendered with their units.

After the Liberation, my grandfather was jobless for a few years because of the stain of being a Kuomintang officer. Finally, with the help of an old friend, he found a job at a publishing house in Beijing. He should have "tucked his tail between his legs," as the saying went for men like him, but he couldn't keep quiet. He said that Chairman Mao was the king of Hell and that the Party officials were the gate-guarding devils. That almost got him sent to prison. Instead, he ended up with an early retirement. Even more incredibly, he survived the ten years of the Cultural Revolution without once being beaten by the Red Guards. There were many sins for which he could have been tortured to death: he was an offspring of capitalists (his parents owned a fabric shop); a reactionary intellectual (he wrote poetry with traditional themes instead of praising the new proletarian regime); a counter-revolutionary remnant (he had been a Kuomintang officer); a hidden spy for the American imperialists (his oldest son was in Taiwan, an ally of America); and a blasphemer of our greatest leader, Chairman Mao. Tens of thousands of people were killed because they belonged to one of those categories, but my grandfather lived a happy and healthy life. By the time I was born, when he was in his late seventies, he had become a neighborhood legend. His hair had gone from sleek and black to almost snow white, but he went to the barber's regularly to have it trimmed; his back was straight, and even though he was only five feet two he seemed to tower over people who were much taller. He got up at five o'clock every morning and jogged for an hour; he wrote poetry and painted during the day. Instead of a gilded stick, he now carried a hand-carved wooden cane, but he rarely used it. He explained to my sister and me that once people saw an old man leaning on a cane they no longer had any interest in him. He carried the cane only to make strangers marvel at his age and his health.

Grandpa never stopped denouncing Chairman Mao. When my sister was in the second grade, she came home one day and recited a poem that she had been taught in school. It was written by Chairman Mao in response to Khrushchev's "goulash Communism." The poem's most famous line was "Stew the potatoes first; then add the beef. Don't sell your fart to us!"

My sister repeated the poem, and I giggled, saying the forbidden word too many times for my mother to remain quiet. "We know you can recite the poem," she said to my sister. "You don't have to repeat it forever."

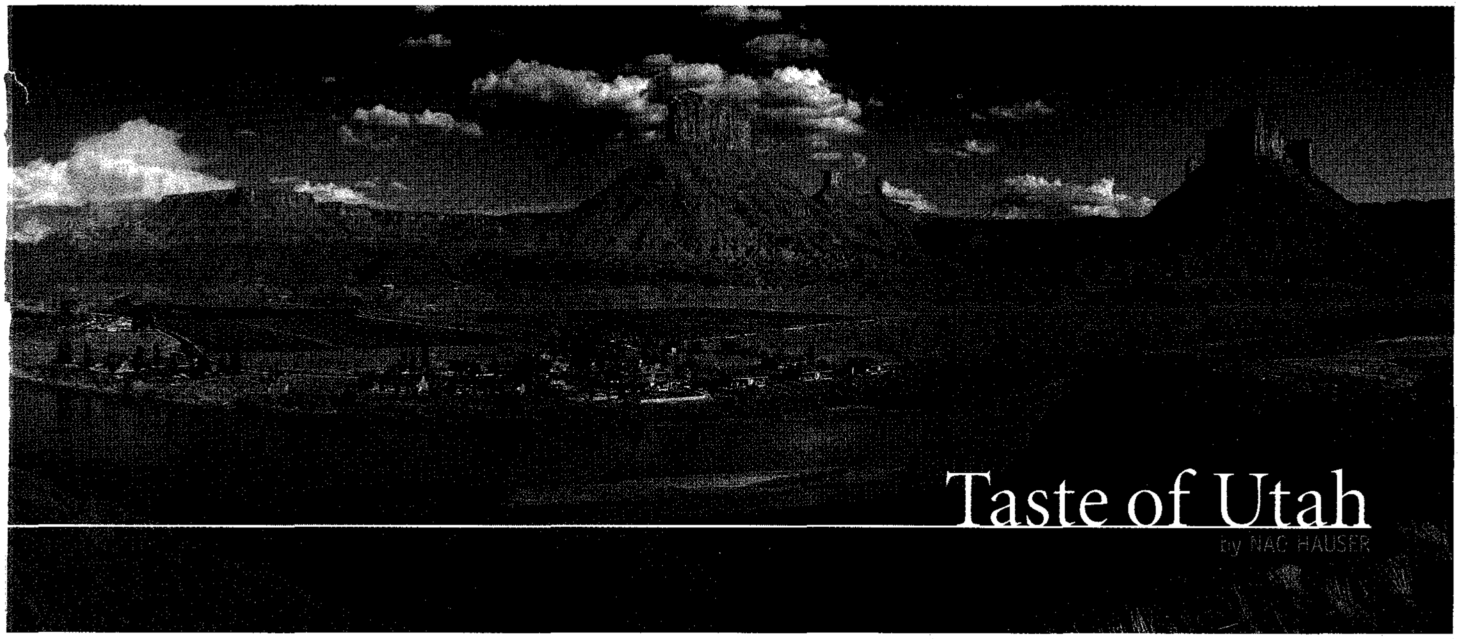
"But you said a poem was to be recited as many times as possible," my sister said.

"A good poem, yes," my mother said.

"This is a poem by Chairman Mao."

"A bad poem by Chairman Mao," Grandpa declared, and explained, line by line, why this was a bad poem: vulgar, unpoetic, horribly rhymed. It was why we needed a good poetry education, he said, so that we would not write like this.

My mother banged the windows shut, worried that people walking by would hear Grandpa. "Can't you all shut up?" she finally said, losing her patience.



Taste of Utah

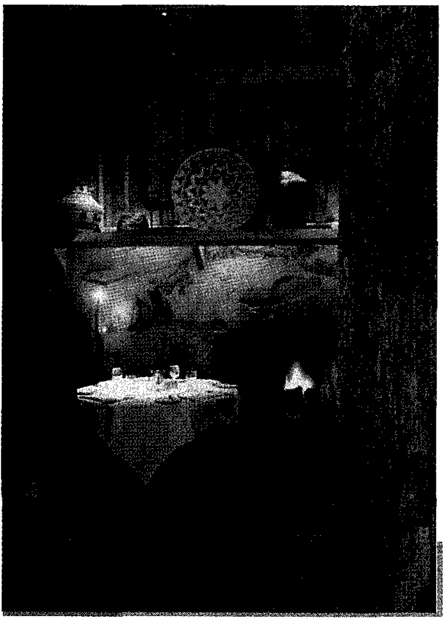
by NAC HAUSER

Every traveling gastronome dreams of coming upon a dining room where the chef cherishes harvests, the wines have been selected for nuance, the décor is nature's grand panorama, and the background music is provided by birdsongs at dusk.

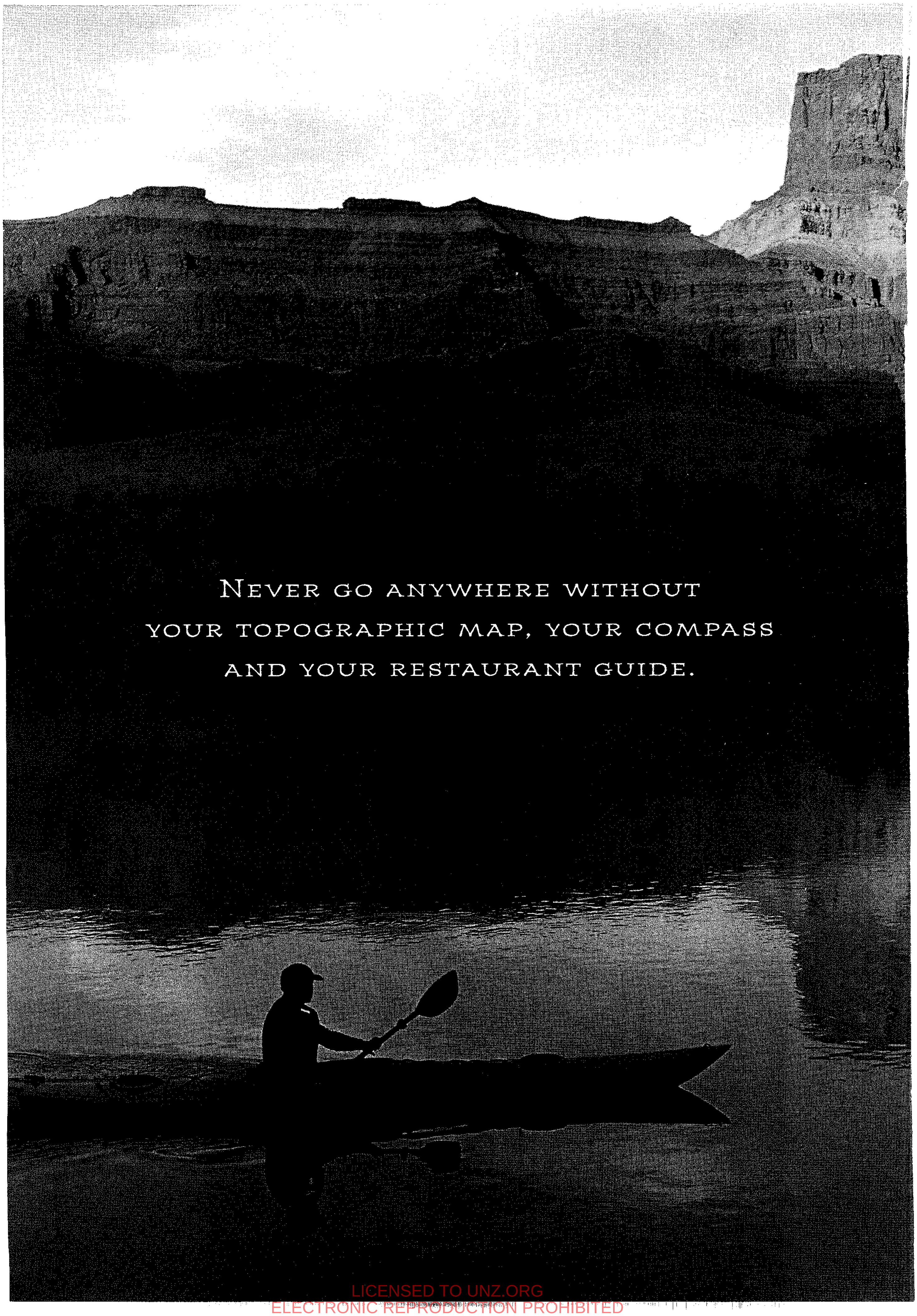
Such restaurants are to be found in the spectacular settings of many of Utah's resorts. In tiny, remote Boulder, on scenic Highway 12 between Bryce Canyon and Capitol Reef national parks, there is a windowside table waiting that you will never want to leave at **Hell's Backbone Grill**. The view is of high-desert mesas and Boulder Mountain, and it also takes in the gardens and grape arbor tended by co-owners and chefs Blake Spalding and Jen Castle. Named for the bridge that crosses the mountain's hair-raising chasm, Boulder Mountain Lodge is an organically oriented oasis that refreshes the senses with its bird-sanctuary pond.

You'll want to taste, first, of the gardens, in a salad of just-picked greens piqued with a dressing of Chimayo chile, star anise, and local honey. Then order the lamb (a Navajo breed raised by a neighboring rancher who also waits tables here) and celebrate the hint of lavender in its red wine sauce. The food is as satisfying as summer's green beans and squash; lemony, mashed potatoes; and a dessert of gingerbread moist with chunks of pear and lavished with old-fashioned butterscotch sauce. The wine list will also afford some subtle surprises.

At Sorrel River Ranch outside Moab, Chef Peter O'Brien counts on the farmers market to supplement the heirloom tomatoes and other produce he grows in the ranch's unusual microclimate. This is John Wayne country, where "Rio Grande," despite its name, was filmed. From the deck of the resort's **River Grill Restaurant**, as you gaze at red rock slashing the deep-blue sky, you can hear the Colorado River rushing beneath you—bringing cool moisture to the chef's gardens. In this setting, start with slices of Utah-raised river trout cooked tableside on a stone borrowed from the Colorado's banks. No less compelling is the organic prime ribeye from Montana, aged twenty-five days, seared in a cast-iron skillet and accompanied by green-chile corn pudding and the chef's long-simmered mole of ancho and Guajillo chiles. Of this ultimate steak sauce the chef says, "It's like the scene you're looking at—rich in intensity, layered, and earthy—and perfect with a big, fat cabernet."



TOP: COURTESY OF SORREL RIVER RANCH RESORT; LEFT: LOG HAVEN; RIGHT: THE TREE ROOM © SUSAN SPAETH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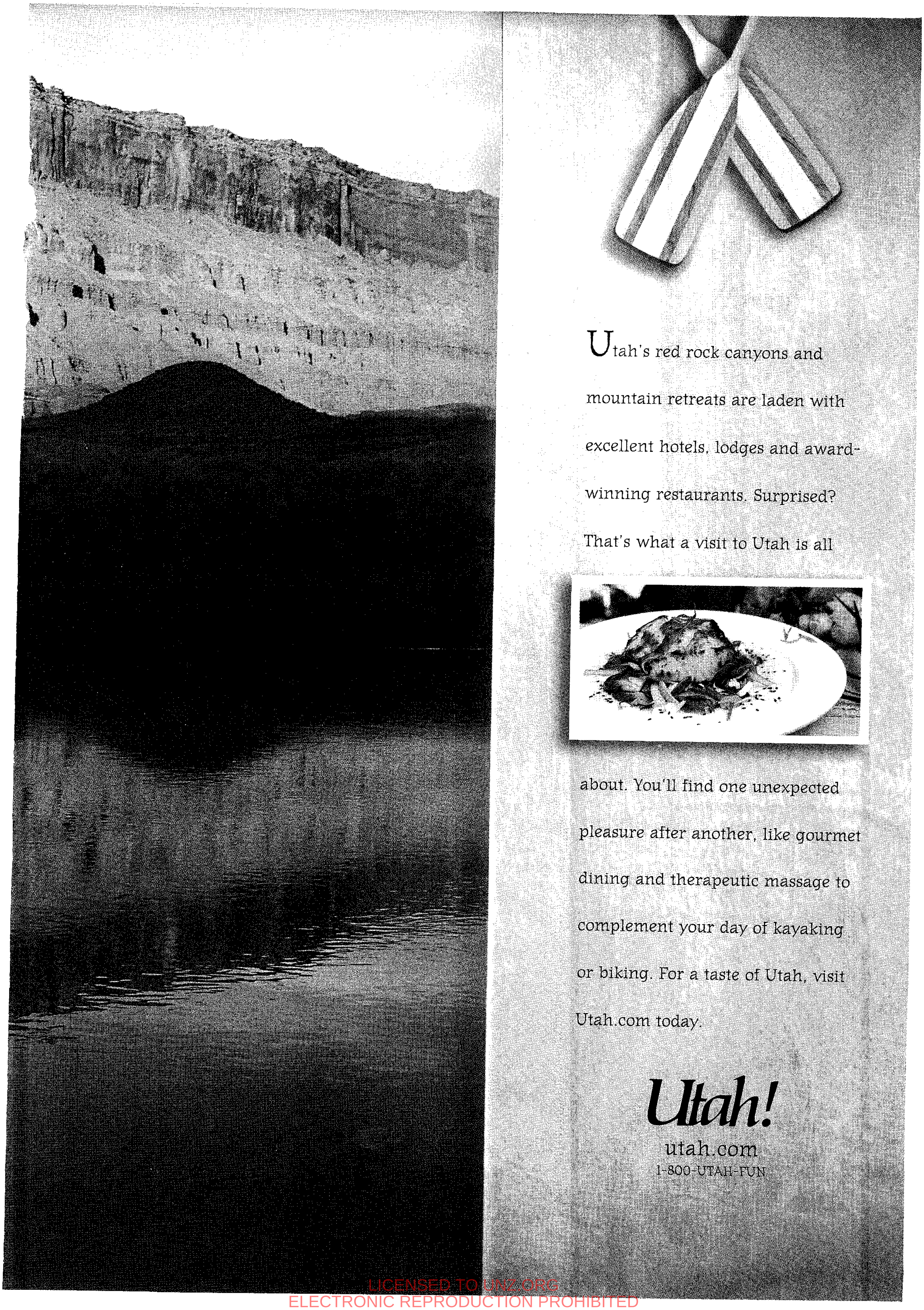

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There's nothing fat about Chef Jeff Crosland's cooking at Red Mountain Spa, in southwest St. George, and that's the miracle of it. Crosland creates low-fat, low-calorie fare that is rich in complexity. At the spa's **Canyon Breeze Restaurant**, which takes its name from the gentle breeze coming off the sandstone formation, even the most ambitious hikers and kayakers will feel sated by a dinner of pan-seared organic duck breast with cabernet-sour cherry *gastrique*. The quinoa pilaf and creamy cauliflower mousse that accompany it demonstrate the chef's great talent for exploiting intrinsic flavors and textures. To taste his vanilla-flecked mascarpone sabayon, layered with homemade lemon curd, is to be inspired, as many guests are, to sign up for his cooking classes.

At **The Tree Room at Sundance**, in northern Utah, the imposing cedar that grows through the dining room sets the rustic mood, complemented by vistas of majestic Mount Timpanogos. The Native American art is from the collection of owner Robert Redford, and diners may find the actor here, enjoying the *aji* or halibut he is said to prefer. But Chef Colton Soelberg offers his own stellar distractions. His bread salad with maple-marinated quail, grilled radicchio, cranberries, and almonds well suits the woodsy ambience. So does the grilled buffalo tenderloin, moistened with game demi-glacé, and perfect with a good burgundy. But this time of year the scene-stealer is a dessert of local peaches, gently grilled to caramelize their juices, and served with lemon-raspberry pound cake and homemade vanilla ice cream.

Named for one of Norway's highest peaks, and known for both its wine cellar and the exquisite chocolates made in its kitchen, **Glitretind**, at the Stein Eriksen Lodge, in Deer Valley, suggests a Euro alpine haven. But Chef Zane Holmquist applies his haute-culinary skills to recreating eclectic American fare in ways both elegant and playful. There is perhaps no better "barbecue" than his starter of oxtail braised in Jim Beam BBQ sauce and set atop savory profiteroles, its richness countered by crisp coleslaw and watermelon cubes. The food here can convey a lasting impression of the setting, as in the sage-rubbed loin of Idaho elk with creamed fresh corn. Recollections of childhood joy are teased out with doughnut holes oozing Valrhona chocolate onto cinnamon gelato and spiced pineapple compote.

LEFT: COURTESY OF THE STEIN ERIKSEN LODGE; BELOW: HELLE

In Salt Lake City you can unwind in the lavish, resort-like expanse of **Log Haven**, which was built in 1920 as a steel baron's bosky getaway and is now a restaurant. Chef David Jones calls the forest scenery, with its waterfalls, trout stream, and wildflower-dotted meadow, "more spectacular than any cuisine can be." Yet he brings unusual deliciousness to it. He serves an appetizer of melted Oaxacan cheese with an earthy, fruity essence of Guajillo chiles, homemade tortillas, and the porcini he forages in the mountains. A grilled, brined pork chop is anointed with a lacquer of juices pressed from the apples of surrounding orchards. To highlight his ethereal vanilla *panna cotta* with late-harvest wine jelly, the chef goes out and picks wild raspberries.

This is cuisine of *le terroir* (to borrow the wine-lover's term). Its character is unmistakably of its place, as is true at the best restaurants throughout Utah. And as with fine wines, the finish lingers, indubitably impressing on memory the pleasures of the meal. ■

(Nao Hauser is a freelance writer living in New York.)

For more information about travel to Utah, call 1-800-200-1160 or visit www.utah.com.

Grandpa ignored her. "Besides, beef-and-potato stew—what kind of food is that? Only a peasant could imagine putting this into poetry!" He then recited several poems for us, all with delicacies beyond Chairman Mao's peasant imagination: fugu, the fish famous for its heavenly taste despite its deadly poison, swimming in springtime, the best season because its flesh was most tender; a single fisherman's boat floating in the mist, waiting for the bass to bite; newly harvested oranges, cut open with a silver knife by the most beautiful prostitute in the Song dynasty, while the Emperor sat by the red lantern, waiting, and the prostitute's lover hid beneath the bed, listening.

Nevertheless, Grandpa would have shared Chairman Mao's love of beef-and-potato stew, if only we had had a ration of beef. We lived in the era of the planned economy. People's salaries were determined mostly by how long they had served the country. My father and my mother earned about the same as people of their age in other fields. Almost everything was rationed: flour, rice, sugar, salt, oil, tofu, eggs, meat, fish, starch. Whatever wasn't rationed became a treat. My sister drank soy sauce from the bottle; I sipped vinegar.

The only meat available on a regular basis was pork, and buying pork, like everything in our life, was a perpetual dilemma. When the sales assistants were in a mean mood, they cut a chunk of fat for the ration. If they were in a good mood, they cut out pieces with little fat and more edible meat; but this presented another problem—there wouldn't be enough lard to supplement the small and unreliable oil ration.

To solve the problem, parents sent their children to buy the twenty-fen meat, a very thin slice cut from the pig's underbelly, which did not count as part of the meat ration. Every child my age grew up with the memory of standing in front of the greasy meat counter, asking for twenty-fen meat with a trembling voice. The slice was thrown across the wide cutting board, which was at a child's eye level. My sister and I took turns buying the pork—if the sales assistants saw you more than once a week, they commented aloud on your parents' sneakiness and stinginess with the ration.

Walking home with a limp slice of pork wrapped in old newspaper, the grease seeping through and darkening the printed words, I dreamed of becoming a sales assistant in a grocery store. Back at home, my father would carefully cut off the fat, saving it for later, and cook the rest of the meat with vegetables—to give the radishes and the cabbage a taste of meat, he said. When the serving bowl was on the table, Grandpa was always the first one to pluck out the few chunks of meat. My chopsticks got in the way of each other when I tried to fight him for a piece, and he was never generous enough to let me win.

When I had trouble swallowing a radish, Grandpa said, "You don't know hunger. If only you had lived through the three years of famine!"

Those years, between 1959 and 1961, were frequently invoked to demonstrate what spoiled children we were.

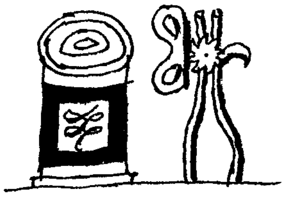
"People ate tree bark and grass roots," Grandpa said. "People were murdered for a kilo of rice."

"My mother's silkworms, a full hut of them, were eaten overnight by hungry mice," my father said. He came from a peasant family in southeast China, where the soil was so barren that nothing the family planted grew well. His mother reared four children and sent two sons to college and two girls to nursing school with the money she earned from her silkworms. "Then the mice were hunted and cooked up."

My mother's tale, the saddest of all, was that her mother, Grandpa's crazy second wife, gave up eating so that she could save her ration for my mother. My grandmother died in the second year of the famine.

"The God of Lightning does not hit the man who eats," Grandpa concluded. "If you don't eat, nobody can help you."

On Sunday mornings, I went grocery shopping with my father. He placed me at the end of the longest line, always at the egg counter, and then left to search for other things. The monthly egg ration for each person was half a kilo, and, most of the time, the store did not even carry eggs. Still, every Sunday we tried our luck.



I stood in line and watched the Sunday bustle. A man walked from line to line and told people that he had lost the ration book for his entire family, but they all shook their heads and turned their backs to him. On the street outside, people waited at a bus stop for the bus, which never came on time. When it finally pulled up, an older man on the other side of the street called out, "Wait, comrade, please wait!" The conductor, a young man with a grin, stuck his head out the window and watched the man running toward the bus; just as he was about to reach the steps, the conductor shut the door. He waved goodbye as the bus pulled away.

As I watched the old man panting from his exertion, I started to weep. Two women standing behind me talked about what a softhearted kid I was. I dried my tears. When my father returned with other groceries, he took my place in the line and told me that I could wander around a little if I liked.

Instead, I pushed my way to the counter to watch the sales assistants. A female assistant weighed the eggs, and a man took the money and filled in the ration books. They stopped from time to time, exchanging jokes. "Look at you," the man said, imitating the woman's slow movement with the eggs. "You don't have to be so careful. They're not your eggs."

"Watch your filthy mouth," the woman said, and threw an egg at the man. He dodged, and the egg broke on the counter in front of me. The woman scooped up the egg and flung it into a basin on the counter. I moved closer. Six yolks floated among the egg whites in the basin, and I swallowed hard. Broken eggs were sold at a higher price than whole eggs, but they did not count toward the ration.

The line moved slowly. Flies with green heads buzzed around the basin, and I shooed them away. The flies kept coming back, and I kept shooing them away.

"Comrade, may I buy those broken eggs there?" an old man asked. My heart beat faster. Those were our eggs. I had been the one to protect them from the flies.

The female sales assistant glanced at the old man and said, "No."

"But why, comrade?"

"Because I said so," the male sales assistant said.

"Because *I* said so," the female sales assistant said, punching her colleague in the chest.

I wished that they would stay in the same mood if anyone ahead of us asked for the broken eggs. I wished that they would change their minds when my father reached the front. I looked at the flies crawling on the sticky counter; too many wishes had made my heart full.

There were about ten people in front of my father when the male sales assistant rejected a ration book. "Today is over. We are not selling anymore."

People gasped. "But, comrade," someone said, pointing to the eggs behind the counter. "These have not sold out yet."

The man and the woman turned and walked to the back of the store arm in arm. People lingered, and when nobody came out to start selling again the crowd dispersed. Sunday after Sunday, the same thing happened, but at times, magically, a sales assistant would return after ten or twenty minutes. Then I ran quickly to the front of the reassembling line, and, if we were lucky enough to have a good-humored sales assistant, I followed my father home and stared at the broken eggs, their beautiful yellow yolks bouncing in the plastic bag, so full and heavy. We did not have a refrigerator at home, and for dinner we would have a plate of scrambled eggs.

On those nights, with a big chunk of scrambled egg between his chopsticks, Grandpa would tell a story. "A villager went to the city and entered a restaurant," he began. "On the menu, he saw a dish called Fried Gold. This sounds good, he thought, so he ordered it. When the waiter came with a plate of scrambled eggs, he was at first enraged and then excited. He ran back home to his wife and said, 'Stop toiling, woman. We are rich now. Do you realize that our hens lay gold?' "

Grandpa told the same story over scrambled eggs again and again, until one day I was old enough to pity and despise him. From where he sat gobbling, he could make fun of people, all idiots in his eyes, and he could recite poetry and criticize Chairman Mao, but he did not understand the hardship behind even a plate of scrambled eggs. What we ate was at the mercy of other people. Eating, instead of being a pleasure, became a burden to me.

"Moose told Dog, and Dog told Frog, and Frog told Kitty, and Kitty told me."

One day, I found a book in Grandpa's collection, describing different ways of meditating. The method I found most attractive was used by nuns in ancient times: by controlling their breathing, they could stop their menstruation and limit their need for food. I was eleven or twelve then, and I thought that nothing would be better than to get rid of all the troubles that weakened one's body. The nuns' meditation became my secret practice in the late afternoons, before my parents returned from work and my sister came home from middle school. Grandpa was always eating snacks while I sat cross-legged on my bed. My stomach grumbled, yearning for the share that he would never give me.

My grandfather did not lose his appetite until the very end of his life. He jogged until he was in his late eighties; once he could no longer run, he took long walks, still refusing to lean on his cane. The God of Lightning does not hit the man who eats—he was living proof of his own belief, this man with a good stomach and extraordinary luck.

It has taken me many lengthy conversations with my mother to understand how my grandfather managed to escape persecution. Once, in the nineteen-thirties, a colleague asked him to help bail a leftist poet out of jail. He did, and afterward was said to have taken the poet to a fancy restaurant and treated him not only to a cup of good tea but also to a full meal. Twenty years later, the poet became a high-ranking official in the Ministry of Culture; when my grandfather made his infamous comment about Chairman Mao, the poet arranged for his early retirement.

Eating had saved him from the labor camp, but it almost derailed him, too. In 1962, after the famine finally ended, my grandfather joined a Saturday lunch club and dined there weekly with a group of retired editors. He met a woman his age, and they fell in love. When he finally brought up the topic of marriage, my mother and her siblings were scandalized. A man his age!

In the same year, my father was introduced to my mother as a possible

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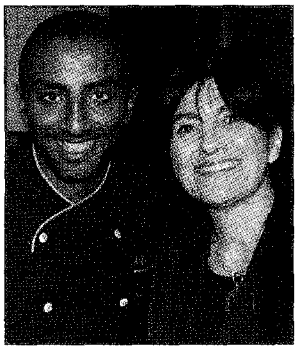
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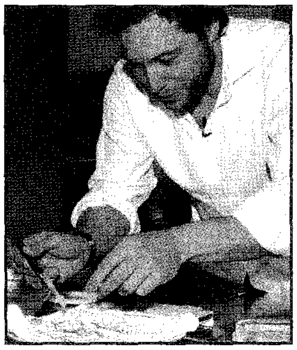
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"The Stevensons sent over a lovely meat basket."

match. The first time they met, at her house, my father—a peasant's son and a new arrival in Beijing—asked for a second bowl of noodle soup. My mother was appalled; a polite guest would rather starve than ask the host for more food. My grandfather, however, approved of the match—this was a man who ate! He also consulted a number of history books and decided that my father's family, generations of peasants as they had been, were direct descendants of the emperors of the Tang dynasty.

My grandfather's marriage never took place, because of his children's vehement opposition, but he happily married my mother off in 1966. To save on rent, or perhaps to escape heartbroken memories, my grandfather left his old house and moved in with my newly wedded parents, who were living in a highly secured complex, where my father and other young scientists worked for a research facility to develop nuclear weapons. Later that year, the Cultural Revolution began, and hundreds of old intellectuals were beaten, whipped, kicked, and killed in public by the Red Guards. My grandfather would have met the same fate if he had married and continued to live in the old neighborhood. Moving in with my parents, however, proved to be the wisest decision he had ever made: because of the importance of the research institute to the national defense system, Red Guards were never allowed to enter our complex.

My grandfather died in 1987, just as the relationship between Mainland China and Taiwan began to thaw, and soon after he received a letter from his oldest son for the first time in nearly four decades. My grandfather lived through three regimes, two world wars, two civil wars, famine, and revolution. What did not change was his faith in eating, which I never understood. An eating man, like a mindless hog, could easily be humiliated and butchered. We were all pieces of meat on other people's cutting boards.

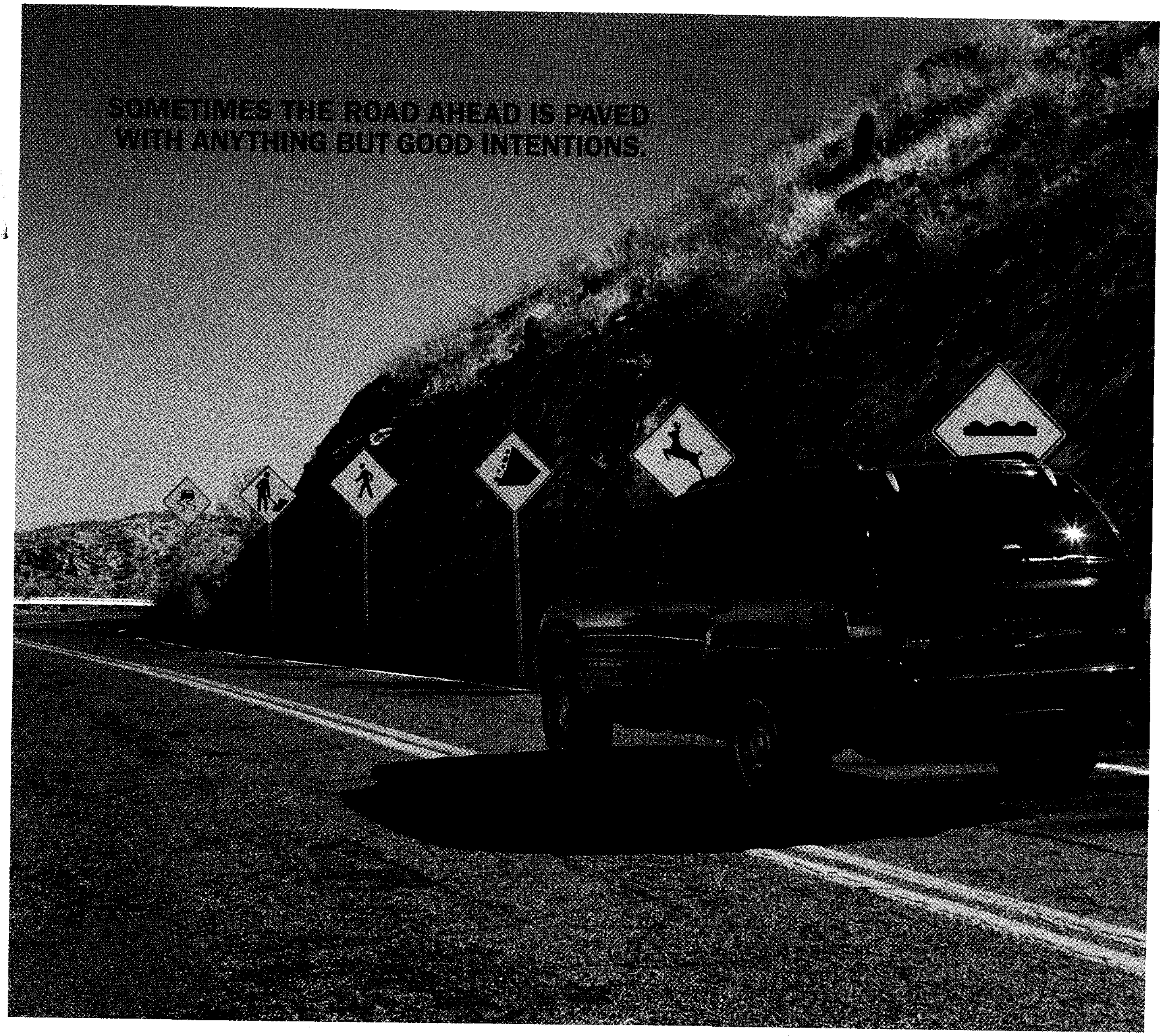
It was not until I was in the Army that my grandfather's wisdom became clear. In 1991, I was eighteen and about to enter Peking University, one of the centers of the pro-democracy movement in Tiananmen Square, two years earlier. After the bloodshed of June, 1989, the government had decided, as a precaution, to send all the university's entering students to the Army for a year of disciplining and brainwashing—"political reëducation," it was called.

Our camp was in a small city in central China. The average temperature in the winter was between thirty-five and forty-five degrees Fahrenheit; according to government policy, the weather was warm enough for heating not to be required. That winter, after a three-day blizzard, the pipes froze, and we were each given one basin of water to last until they thawed. Every morning, we had to break the ice before we could wash our faces. We had thin gruel for breakfast, and radish stew for lunch and supper. We lived in hunger, and despair.

On New Year's Eve, the nine girls in my squad, frostbitten, starved, and shivering, had a spiritual banquet. Taking turns, we talked about the best food we had ever eaten. Without giving it much thought, I offered my grandfather's lard-and-soy-sauce soup. Unlike the extravagant dishes that my squadmates described, mine was the only one that seemed possible in the camp. If we could sneak into the kitchen, start a small fire, boil a pot of water, and add spoonfuls of lard and soy sauce, we would have the soup.

We dreamed on until lights-out. None of us dared to get between the icy sheets. I realized that only someone who had known hunger and coldness could have invented the lard-and-soy-sauce soup, and, for the first time, I recalled with fondness the days when my grandfather had carefully cut expensive gourmet pickles into small pieces with a silver knife, unaware that I was hiding beneath the table, watching him.

In the darkness, one of the girls opened a bag of powdered milk. We circulated the bag and swallowed. The powder chafed our throats; the extreme sweetness became bitterness. I vowed that I would never again eat powdered milk, but I could not refuse the bag when it was handed to me the second time. What we ate was at other people's mercy, but in choosing whether to eat or not to eat we were at the mercy of ourselves. ♦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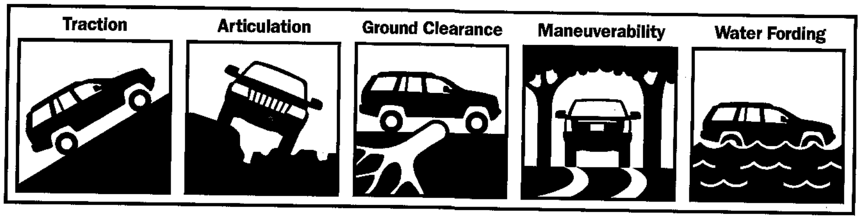
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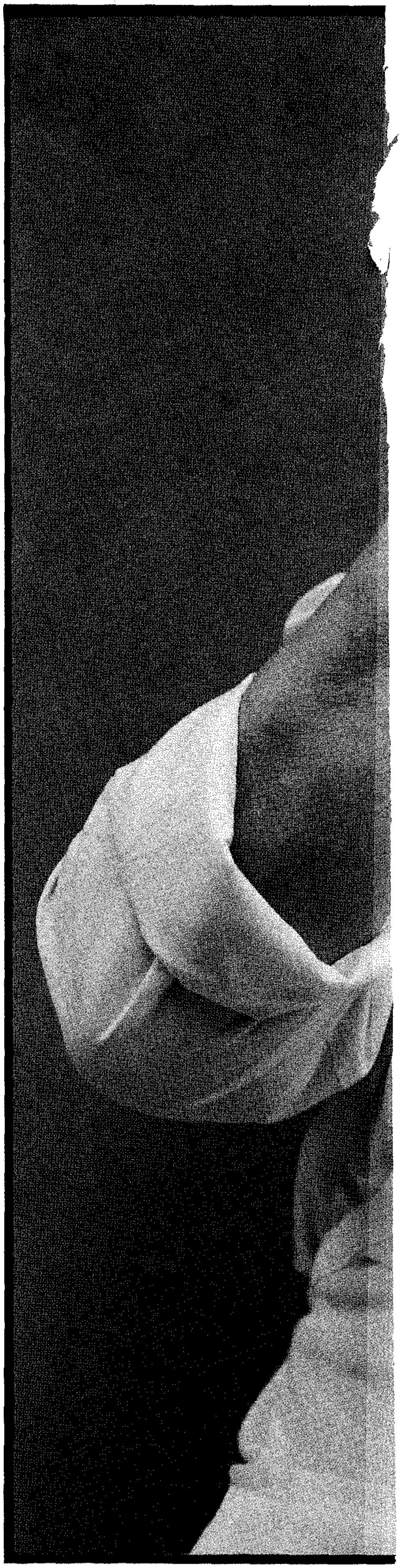
THE PASTA STATION

How can something simple be so difficult?

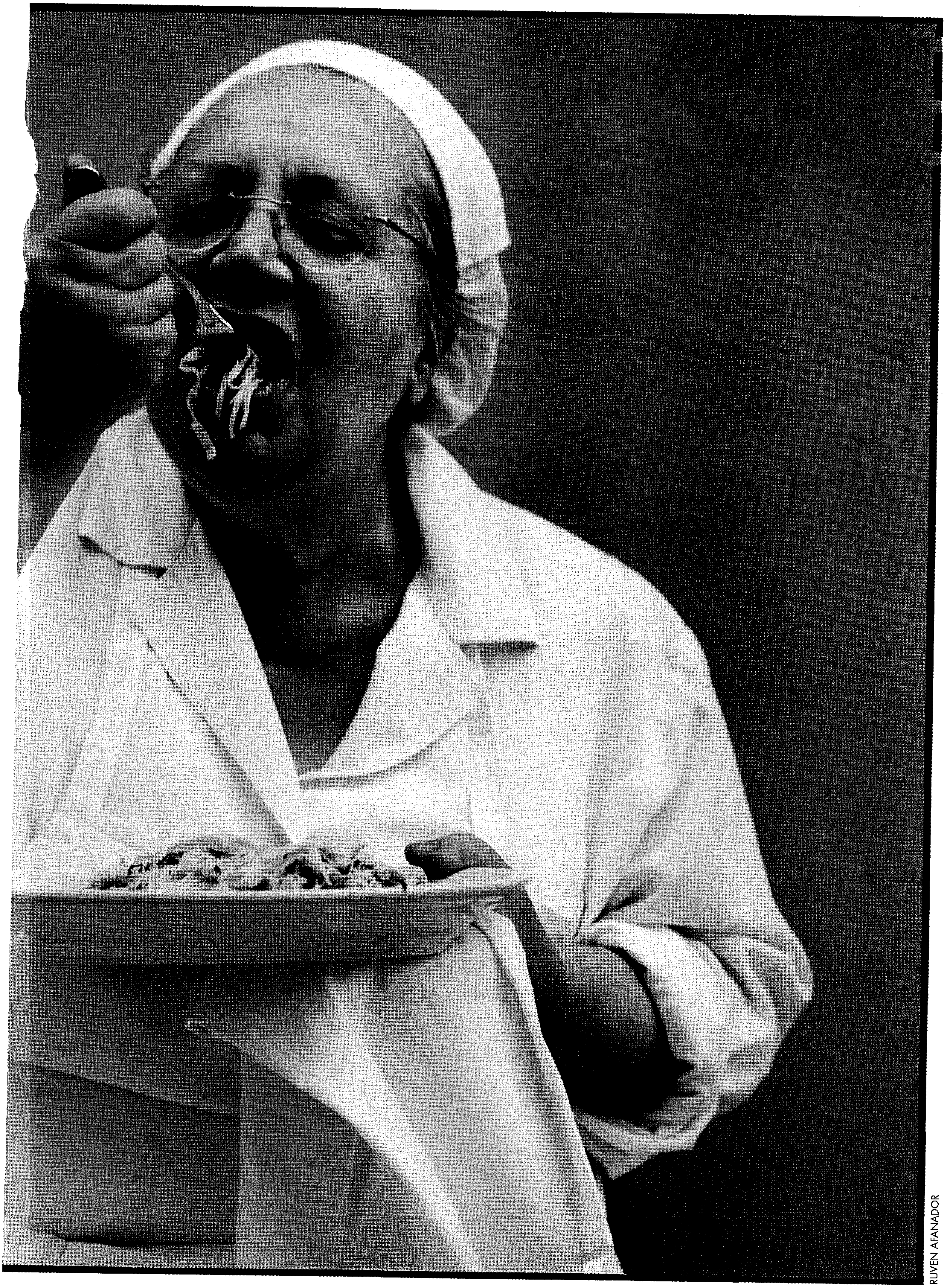
BY BILL BUFORD

The first time I ate a homemade soft, filled pasta in Italy, I felt that my life, in some small but enduring way, would never be the same: *this* was what I wanted to learn how to make. My discovery occurred three years ago, in the village of Zibello, in the Po River Valley, about twenty miles from the city of Parma—a livestock heartland of Italy. (All day, and everywhere, there was a pervasive porcine smell and invisible particles of something I didn't really want to think about clinging to my hair and clothes.) The pasta was prepared by Miriam Leonardi, the fifth woman, in successive generations, to be running the kitchen of the Trattoria la Buca. The place had been recommended to me by a friend, who mentioned several dishes in addition to the pasta: eel, frogs' legs, tripe, and, most notably, culatello, a preparation of pork that is a specialty of the village. Culatello—the word translates loosely as a lovely little "buttness"; *culo* means "ass"—is made from the hindquarters of a pig, boned, stuffed into a bladder, cured, and then hung for up to two years in the famously damp local cellars. The method is deemed "unmodern" by the United States Department of Agriculture, and culatello is therefore unavailable in America. Miriam, as she insisted upon being addressed, ran her trattoria in the Italian style of you-don't-cut-an-onion-until-the-dish-has-been-ordered, and, after each course, she waddled out and asked me what I wanted next. She had just turned sixty-two. She wore a tight-fitting white chef's cap—more scarf than hat—and had dark eyebrows and a big, hooked, masculine nose. She never smiled. She was a little over five feet tall, with a wide girth, and, moving slowly, had an overwhelming sense of ease and confidence; she has, after all, been making this walk from her kitchen to her tables and back to the kitchen for forty-five years. I had a plate of culatello—served with shavings of butter on top. It was a deep red-brown, with a light, soft fluffiness—no obvious fat, although obviously fatty—and a piggy intensity I'd never tasted before. (The friend who recommended Miriam's to me now has such a craving for her culatello that he regularly imports it, illegally.) To illustrate the handmade-how of it all, Miriam then showed me her operation, a *cantina*, just behind the kitchen, where I counted the culatelli, a hundred rows of ten, hanging from the rafters, and being refrigerated by nothing more than the breezes off the Po. I breathed in deeply, wanting to enjoy the romance of what Miriam referred to as the *profumo profondo della mia carne*, the perfume of her meat, and concluded, after identifying the dank, humid smell of aging animal and the ammonia sharpness of the mold clinging to a thousand ancient pig bladders, that the perfume was probably an acquired taste. I mentioned that I was trying to cure meats myself, under the instruction of Mario Batali, who runs Babbo, the Italian restaurant in New York, where, as it happened, Miriam's daughter had eaten on a recent trip to America. (The daughter, who will be the sixth woman to run the trattoria, objected only to the tripe: not enough cheese, not enough butter.) For the rest of the afternoon, Miriam kept referring to Mario, "the famous New York chef," and cackling. "He probably uses a refrigerator because he's so smart," she said, and laughed uproariously. "What I prepare in my kitchen," she said, "is what my grandmother taught me. She cooked what *her* grandmother taught her. And she cooked what *her* grandmother taught her. You think I'm interested in a famous New York chef?" She said "New York" as though it were a bad taste in the mouth.

I ate two pastas that day. The more



Miriam Leonardi, at her family's trattoria, with tagliatelle al culatello.



RUVEN AFANADOR

memorable was giant pillowy ravioli, distinguished by their thin, floppy lightness. They had been dressed with butter and honey, and filled with pumpkin, so that you experienced an unexpected taste explosion when you bit into one. The pumpkin, roasted and mixed with parmigiano cheese, was like a mouthful of autumn: the equivalent of waking up and finding that the leaves on the trees outside your window had changed color. The dish was called tortelli di zucca. (*Zucca* means "pumpkin.") In English, you see the word "ravioli" more than you see "tortelli"; in Italy, the two words have been used interchangeably for centuries, although technically ravioli are the filling and tortelli the pasta casing. (It's still possible to get ravioli without a pasta; they are called *ravioli nudi*—naked ravioli—and look like little balls of filling, as though the chef had run out of flour that day.) A torta is one of the oldest food preparations in Italy; it describes a stuffed noodle, a container of dough with a filling inside. Tortelli are small versions of a torta. Tortellini are even smaller ones. (According to one of the many stories of the pasta's origins, it was folded up by a Bolognese baker to look like the navel of a married woman he was having an affair with, shaped with such verisimilitude that the likeness was identified by the unhappy husband.) Recipes for making a torta, and the many variations on a torta theme, are among the earliest published in Italy, and include those of a fifteenth-century chef known as Maestro Martino.

The Maestro's account is at the heart of Europe's first international cookbook best-seller, "De Honesta Voluptate et Valetudine" ("On Right Pleasure and Good Health"). The book was written, in Latin, around 1465, not by the Maestro himself but by a Lombard known as Platina, who was not a cook but a scholar, a humanist (his other works include a biography of the Popes, a treatise on war and a treatise on peace, and one on love and one against it), and an eater. In 1463, a year after he arrived in Rome, at the age of forty-one, he was invited by Cardinal Ludovico Trevisan, a legendary glutton and gourmand, to escape a hot summer in the city and come to the Cardinal's hilltop retreat in Albano, southeast of Rome. Maestro Martino was the Cardinal's cook.

The Maestro was also a native of Lombardy (he was born near Lake Como), and, like Platina, had only just arrived in Rome (from Milan, where he had worked for the nobles of the city), and the two men, probably about the same age, established an immediate rapport. For Platina, the Maestro's preparations were a revelation, and he spent much of the summer at the Maestro's side, learning everything he could of this new discipline. The book that he then wrote is really two books. One is a humanist treatise on the nature of nutrition and living well, borrowing heavily from classical authorities and written, in the style of Pliny's Natural History, as a succession of numbered paragraphs (on sleep or salt or figs), each paragraph ending with a salutary observation: that five almonds eaten before drinking wine protect you from getting drunk; that leeks are good for the bowels but too many produce bad dreams; that an occasional portion of porcupine meat reduces bed-wetting; or that "the testicles of younger animals are considered better than those of old animals," except in the case of roosters, whose testicles are good, regardless of the age of the bird, especially if served alongside calves' feet and spices, in the Roman style.

Halfway through, the style changes. "O immortal gods," Platina suddenly declares, in the middle of describing how to make a blancmange. "What a cook you bestowed in my friend Martino of Como!" He then goes on to extoll Maestro Martino's eloquence on the subject of cooking, and to insist that, in the Maestro, we are witnessing a representative of the future: an advocate of the "modern cooking school," where food is subjected to "the keenest of discussions" and its

URBAN COMPOST HEAP
FOOD THAT WENT BAD IN THE FRIDGE, BECAUSE WHO HAS TIME TO COOK?
COFFEE CUPS
CHINESE TAKEOUT MENUS
BEYOND-REPAIR CELL PHONES
BROKEN THREE-DOLLAR UMBRELLA
RANDOM SNEAKERS
PLASTIC BAGS
SLICED TURKEY
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DROPPED PENNIES

preparation treated with profound seriousness. The rest of the book is given over to the Maestro's recipes, told, noticeably, in a different voice—the Maestro's, I suspect. In hanging around a chef's kitchen just long enough to steal his recipes, Platina is also illustrating an early example of a modern practice (recipe theft), and when, four hundred and sixty-four years later, a manuscript, written in Italian, of the Maestro's recipes was discovered in a bookshop by an American food writer (an English translation will appear next year), it became obvious just how extensively Platina had plagiarized the Maestro, deviating from his recipes only in error (leaving out an essential ingredient, say) or to add one of his Pliny-like medical observations, as in his addendum to a recipe for boiled cannabis meatballs (*offa cannabina*), a dish "to be fled from, for it nourishes badly, arouses squeamishness, generates pain in the stomach and intestines, and dulls the eyes." There are a few other cannabis recipes, too, evoking fifteenth-century stoners loitering in the Vatican Library.

The Maestro was a gifted chef, with considerable flair. When he prepares blancmange, for instance (a sweet, meaty white sauce made from minced capon breast and almond milk), he suggests dividing the sauce in two and adding egg yolk and saffron to one part, so you can then serve the two sauces together, a swirl of white and bright yellow. For more color, you might sprinkle red pomegranate seeds on top. On occasion, the Maestro's flashiness is too much for Platina. He dismisses the Maestro's eggs roasted on a spit, for instance, as a "stupid concoction, one of the absurdities and games of cooks." (The Maestro delicately pokes a needle through the shell of a raw egg and suspends it over the fire, turning it gently, until the egg is ready to eat.) There is also the Maestro's use of meat to fill his torte, which was controversial, French, and inexcusably pretentious: typical, Platina says, of "this pampered" age of ours.

For Platina, there was already an established way of doing things. Your torte and your tortelli were filled not with meat but with vegetables bound by fat or butter, eggs, and cheese. And, to be fair to the Maestro, most of his recipes are the established ones—established, that is, in 1465—and include many vegetable-filled torte and tortelli. The Maestro's torta di zucca, for instance, calls for grating the pumpkin, boiling it in milk, and then mixing it with parmigiano, plus a little ginger, cinnamon, and saffron—the familiar Christmassy spices of the Renaissance. Traditional then, and traditional still: this (minus the Renaissance flavorings) is almost the same filling that was served to me by Miriam at Trattoria la Buca in her tortelli di zucca. In fact, the impression you draw from the Maestro's recipes—and the almost eerie delight you get from reading them today—is not only of difference (exotic spices; fascination with sugar; the use of a pot suspended over a fire, because there was no oven) but of continuity: you picture the Maestro's hands preparing food (kneading the pasta dough, letting it rest, making a broth with bones from the capon, cooking the pasta in it, removing it to another pan, dressing it with melted butter and cheese) according to a set of rules that had already been highly codified, for who knows how long. Before Platina, no one had been there to write them down.

My lunch at La Buca was, in this respect, representative: versions of every dish I ate there can be found in Platina's book. The tripe: from the Maestro, I learned that the trick is to cook it twice (Miriam's trick as well), not to use salt during the first cooking (which makes it tough), and to add a pork bone ("It will be tastier"); then to remove the tripe from the pan, cut it into pieces, add mint, sage, and salt, cook it again (this makes it tender), and serve it with cheese on top. I ate eel. (I returned to La Buca in the evening, and there were people who had driven miles for the eel.) For the Maestro, there were two preparations: on a spit (skinned, gutted, cut into large pieces skewered with a leaf of sage between them); and braised (which was Miriam's preparation, too). The frogs' legs (rolled in grain, then fried in olive oil) were cooked, more or less, the same way by both the Maestro and Miriam (she used bread crumbs instead), but the Maestro's more colorful presentation, with a salsa verde (*salsa viridi*) and fennel pollen (*feniculi floribus*)—yellow-green fennel pollen on the bright-green sauce—was distinguished by what I now recognize to be his greater visual confidence.

"I am not creative," Miriam said at one point. "That's not what I do. What I do is what has been handed down to me. For ten generations—and maybe longer, I can't tell, there are no records—we've been cooking for people who weren't hungry." Her ancestors, she believes, learned the traditions of food preparation in the kitchens of the local nobles, in the heart of the Po Valley. The Maestro's first kitchens—those of the nobles of Milan—were not far away on the culinary map.

When I returned to New York, I had this idea that I needed to learn pasta—I didn't understand how something so simple (flour, water, sometimes an egg, a pot of boiling water) could be so different in different hands. And by pasta I meant the soft, handmade kind, like Miriam's. Dried pasta now seemed to me an industrial food, made by a machine—not the real thing.

I approached Mario Batali, the Babbo chef, the star of the Food Network's "Molto Mario," and the genius behind some of the best pasta in New York (after all, even Miriam's daughter had found it edible).

"Mario," I said, "I want to work the pasta station at Babbo."

"You can't do it," he said. "Look at you. You physically can't do it. You're in your forties. You're too old. You have to be in your twenties. It's too fast—you no longer have the mind for it." (And this same mind, thus warned, sank momentarily into a Shakespearean despair, recognizing the limits of mortality and despondently surveying the many things in life that were now, owing to age, definitively beyond its capacities, like higher mathematics or the infinitesimal subtleties of molecular biology, until I stopped myself. The issue was boiling a piece of food in hot water—how difficult was that going to be?) And Mario relented. (Which wasn't the same as his agreeing: his last words were "O.K. I warned you"—not exactly an enthusiastic endorsement.)

At Babbo, a dish of fresh pasta was conceived in two stages: the pasta itself was made during the day, and then the preparation (the cooking and the saucing) was done, to order, in the evening. To make the pasta, two machines were used: one, which mixed large quantities of flour and eggs, made the dough, and the other rolled it out into long sheets. The pasta was then cut up or filled, depending on what you were making, and divided into serving-size portions, and each portion was put into a plastic bag and frozen. (In my head, I imagined Miriam's voice: "Mario Batali is so clever he even owns a freezer!")

To start, Mario thought it might be a good idea if I tried my hand at Stage One—making some pasta—and teamed me with Alejandro, who was then the daytime pasta guy. Our first task was making many hundreds of orecchiette. "Orecchiette" is a diminutive of *orecchio,* which means "ear," and it is regarded as one of the easiest pastas to make. The dough consists of flour and water (the flour is semolina, a cruder flour than the all-purpose stuff found in an American kitchen), and you roll it out by hand until it looks like a white tube. You then chop the tube into bite-size segments and crush each segment on a ridged piece of wood with your thumb, and, like a child's magic trick, the pasta changes shape under the pressure: when you remove it, it has ridges underneath and, on top, it's shaped like an ear (unless it was one that I had to peel off my thumb that first day, in which case the ridges looked like a tic-tac-toe board, because I invariably had to do the thing twice, and wasn't able to line it up correctly the second time, and the ear was all large and distorted, a floppy flap of dough, more like a cartoon elephant's ear than a normal ear, because my hands had got so clammy from the anxiety of finally making pasta that it wouldn't come off my thumb). At the end of the session, Alejandro showed Mario examples of what I'd produced—mine were fatter than normal orecchiette, not squished enough, and verging on mutant—to see if they should be served that night or thrown away. Mario examined them, sighed, and said, "Oh, they're O.K.," and then chuckled in a way that meant, "Bill, this is one of the easiest things in the kitchen to make, and yet—"

There are about forty ears in a serving—each one crushed by some guy's thumb—and eventually I mastered the squishing technique. I also discovered that, after you've made the first two thousand or so, your mind wanders: you think about everything, anything, whatever, nothing. (Such moments illustrate what is referred to as the Zen of making pasta, which is also a way of saying that making pasta can be very, very boring.) I was rather earnest during this phase, so I found that when my mind wandered it tended not to stray too far from the matter at hand. Why, I asked myself, would anyone want to eat a thing that looks like a squashed ear (yet, evidently, people have been doing it for hundreds of years)? So I studied each pasta and thought hard about its shape. The explanation I came up with involved belly buttons. As with belly buttons, there are two kinds of pasta: innies and outies. The innies, like ravioli and tortelli, are designed to surprise you with goodies inside: you bite in and discover a juicy something previously hidden from view. The outies are designed to "hold on" to the goodies from the outside. People like to eat orecchiette because they retain a tiny cup of sauce in their "ear," I decided, while ingeniously holding on to a little more on the bottom, along the ridges.

I made other pastas. I was being educated in texture: how you handle a long sheet of pasta like a piece of fabric, how it interacts with the air, the ways you can stretch it and the ways you can't. I made black pasta by adding squid ink to the mix, and gnocchi from big white Idaho potatoes. Garganelli, one of my favorites, required two elementary tools, a pencil and the same ridged piece of wood used for the orecchiette. You wrapped a square of dough around the pencil, and rolled it out against the wood, while exerting a little pressure; the result was a perfect outie—a tubular pasta but with ridges. (It looked a little like a ribbed caterpillar.)

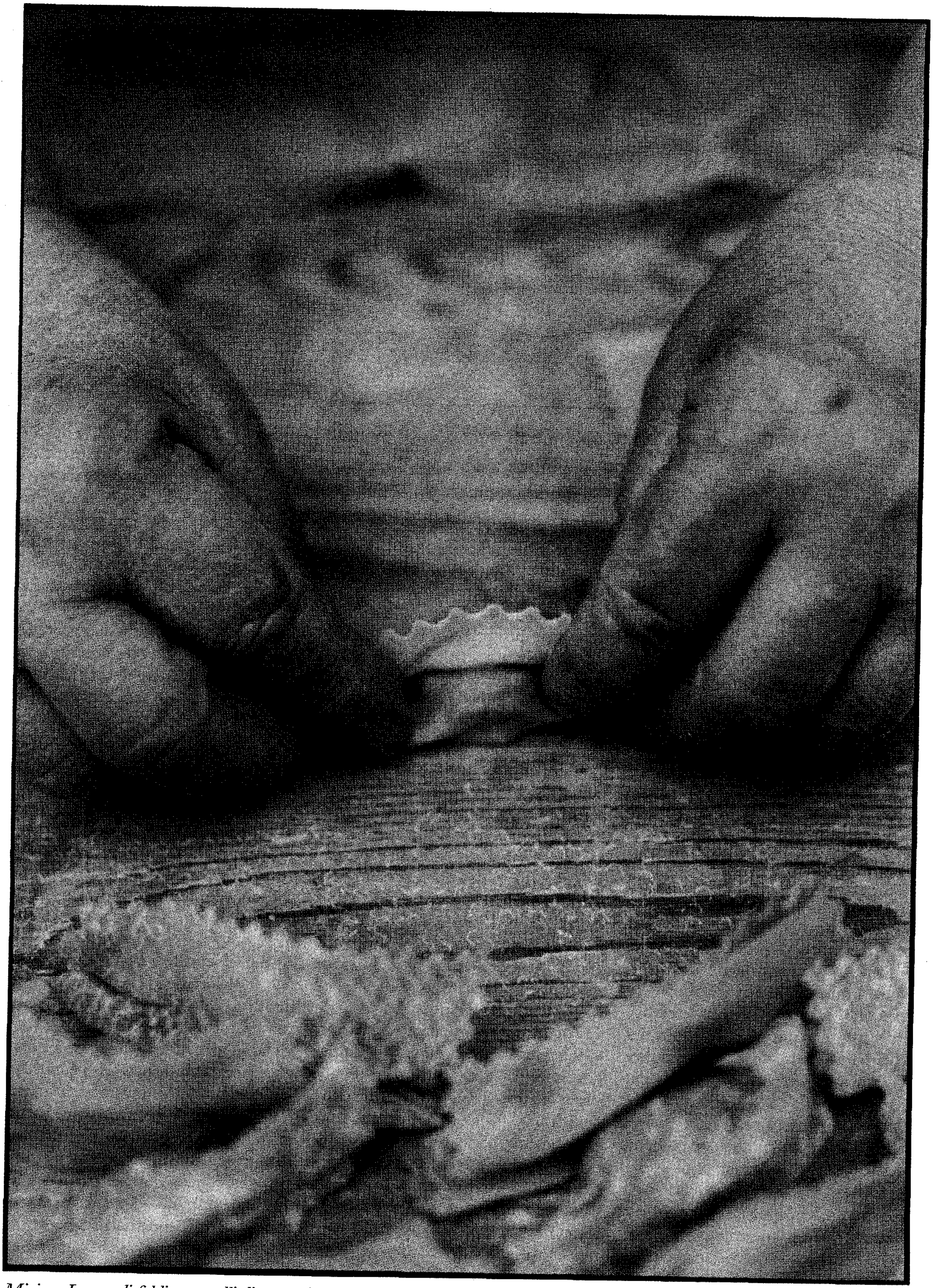
Around half of the Babbo pastas were stuffed. Four of them were called ravioli and filled with cow brains, fennel and potato ("fenpot"), goose liver, or beef cheeks (the house specialty). Then, there were the pyramids, filled with whatever meaty thing was at hand, and the lune, filled with butternut squash, a cousin of Miriam's tortelli di zucca (Babbo's version was cut into circles, like *la luna*); mezzelune, with dried cod inside, and so named because they were cut to look like half-moons; and "love letters," filled with sweet peas and mint leaves (the name, like the pasta, was a poeticized mutation of a smaller pasta called francobolli, or "postage stamps"), which were air-mail-sticker-size rectangles, with zigzaggy ends.

Postage stamps, little moons, half-moons, and belly buttons. I feel compelled to pause for a moment and ask: What other culture has a tradition of serving up its national cuisine in the form of little toys? There seems never to have been a time when Italians weren't playing with their food. (When you make tortelli, one of Italy's oldest cookbooks says, at the beginning of the fourteenth century—and with such unrestrained glee that you're left to conclude that this food-as-a-plaything situation has been a feature of the Italian meal for a very long time—you can shape the dough into "horseshoes or brooches or rings, the letters of the alphabet, or any animal you can imagine.") Is the secret appeal of pasta, the world's greatest comfort food, in its evocation of childhood? Must an Italian dinner always include a version of animal crackers?

Pasta continued to intimidate me. If I couldn't recognize all these shapes, how would I ever learn to make and cook them? I now realize that even Italians don't know them: even if you grow up eating bow ties and guitar strings and pens, you never learn all the pastas, because there are too many—hundreds, according to the curator of the Museo Nazionale delle Paste Alimentari, Italy's national pasta museum, in Rome, where you can lose yourself for several hours marvelling at hundreds of years of food toys, exhibited like so many different butterflies in a lepidopterist's collection. But there is a basic pasta vocabulary—that's what most Italians master—that allows them to interpret all the variations they encounter for the rest of their lives. ("Oh, I get it, it's like penne, but gigantic, and with ridges.") And, if nothing else, I remained determined to learn the vocabulary.

When I was finally allowed to work at the pasta station in the evening, I discovered a cheat sheet taped to the wall. Everyone, I learned, needs a cheat sheet in the first weeks (there were more than twenty pasta dishes, a mixture of "fresca," fresh, and dried), and with this one—a page of once yellow blue-lined legal paper, rendered into a greasy transparency by some wild olive-oil moment—I was relieved to see that my predecessor had also been clueless and that the ingredients for preparing each dish were written out with a blunt pencil, along with some diagrams in the margins: two concentric circles to illustrate

RUVEN AFANADOR



Miriam Leonardi folding tortelli di zucca the way her family has done for ten generations or more.

"Would you say the tuna salad kicks ass?"

• •

the hollow bucatini, for instance (*buco* means "hole"; *bucatini* means "things with little holes"); a flattish oblong to represent the linguine (*lingua* means "tongue," and *linguine* means "little tongues"); a small box to depict the chitarre (the pasta was thick and rough, like the bass strings of a guitar). Most of the names were misspelled, phonetic approximations: "ork" was orecchiette—no person, learning the station, would have known the word "orecchiette," and, besides, it was never used. What you heard was "ork," and you didn't see a written version, because, unlike every other station in the kitchen, where ticker-tape printouts were tacked up along the edge of a shelf, just above eye level, to remind you what you had next, this one had no place to stick the little slips of paper, which would have wilted in the steam and fallen off. Besides, the orders came so fast (everyone orders pasta) that you had no choice but to keep them in your head, however they happened to be spelled when you put them there.

What a pasta is served with is a wholly different branch of philosophy. At Babbo, five of the twenty or so pastas were served with a ragù. The Italian ragù and the French ragoût are more or less the same thing; in any language, the process (I now know) involves taking a piece of meat and, as it was described in the vernacular of the kitchen, cooking the shit out of the fucker. The term is one of many at the heart of a centuries-long debate between advocates of French cooking and advocates of Italian, in the we-were-there-first stakes. The rivalry, felt more acutely by the Italians, who believe that they are seen by the French as a tribe of amusing primitives, might be summarized thus. In the history of modern European cooking, the Italian peninsula was the first territory to establish a sophisticated "high" cuisine, in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, in tandem with so many other creative flourishings of the Renaissance, and appeared principally on the tables of the wealthy in Milan, Florence, and Naples; then, the Italians claimed, their great secrets were packed up and transported over the Alps by Catherine de' Medici when, in 1553, she married the man who eventually became Henry II of France.

Afterward, France underwent its own cooking renaissance, culminating in the post-ancien régime Olympian dining events of Antonin Carême (with his elaborate aspics, his all-day sauces, and his extravagantly embellished architectural desserts), while the Italians, having decided that the New World fruit known to us as the tomato wasn't poisonous after all, and even had promise as a sauce, sank into a two-hundred-and-fifty-year culinary depression, and, in outright violation of their territorial and chauvinistic character, started imitating the French. All those "alla" constructions, for instance, that you see attached to dishes—risotto alla milanese, pollo alla cacciatora, bucatini all'amatriciana—are the Italian equivalent of the French *à la*, and arose out of a panicky effort to sound more sophisticated. Words changed: *potacchio*, meaning a thick soup, comes from the French *potage; al cartoccio*, a way of cooking something in a paper envelope, became *in papigliote*, after the French *en papillotte;* and a *sugo* became a *ragù.*

In 1903, the now very grand French cuisine was codified encyclopedically in Auguste Escoffier's "Guide Culinaire," which remains the seminal text of the "classical" approach. The seminal text in Italian cooking, "La Scienza in Cucina e l'Arte di Mangiar Bene" ("The Science of Cookery and the Art of Eating Well"), was written around the same time, and was a collection of home recipes gathered over a lifetime by a rich textile merchant named Pellegrino Artusi. Like Escoffier's book in France, Artusi's remains the ur-text of modern Italian cooking. The two books exemplify the difference between the two food cultures. Escoffier, drawing on his experience as the head of the restaurants in the grand hotels run by his partner César Ritz, tells you the two hundred ways to make a sauce. Artusi, drawing on conversations with and letters from country housewives, tells you about belly buttons and the invention of tortellini. The French have become professional, scientific, urban, and refined; the Italians have made a virtue of being improvising amateurs, rustic and simple, following preparations handed down for generations.

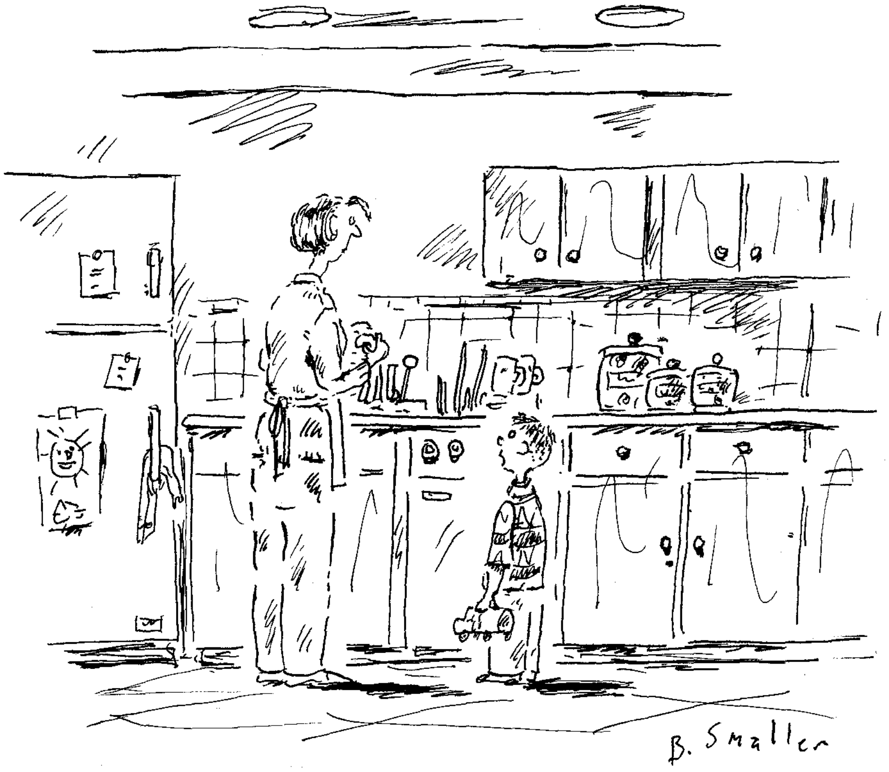
Fundamentally, a ragù is an equation involving a solid (meat) and a liquid (broth or wine), plus a slow heat, until you reach a result that is neither solid nor liquid. The most famous ragù is a Bolognese, although there is (also famously) not one Bolognese but many. (Gianni Valdiserri, who, with his wife, Betta, taught Mario how to make pasta at their restaurant in the mountains not far from Bologna, confessed to me that when he and Betta married—Betta pregnant, sixteen years old, and still in school—he was concerned that, in their hurry, he hadn't yet tasted her ragù. This ragù, which she had learned from her aunt, had been passed down through many generations of her family, and would be different from the ragù that Gianni grew up eating, his mother's, which was profound and complex and touched something deep in his soul. He also knew that he'd never be able to teach Betta to prepare someone else's—she'd refuse; a ragù, he said, was a very personal thing—so imagine his happiness the first time he ate a ragù made by Betta and discovered that, yes, it was different from his mother's, and better.)

A Bolognese, made with a medieval kitchen's quirky sense of ostentation and flavorings, is unusually complicated. There are at least two meats (beef and pork, although local variations can insist on veal instead of beef, and prosciutto instead of pork, and sometimes prosciutto, pancetta, sausage, and pork, not to mention chicken livers) and three liquids (milk, wine, and broth), and either tomatoes (if your family recipe is modern) or no tomatoes (if the family recipe is older than Columbus), plus whatever else your great-great-great-great-grandmother said was essential. (The only meat in Miriam's, for instance, is sausage, cooked slowly with butter *and* oil, plus her own homemade tomato sauce, and the slightest hint of garlic: one clove, removed before the cooking is completed.) In any variation, however, the result has a texture characteristic of all ragùs: a crumbly stickiness (that condition of being neither solid nor liquid, the meat having broken down into little bits, the liquid having almost entirely evaporated). Other ragùs—sausage, rabbit, wild boar, hare, lamb—are more straightforward (meat, finely chopped-up vegetables, broth, a bottle of wine), but, whatever the ingredients, the result is the same, something that will stick to the surface of pasta, more dry than wet, a dressing more than a sauce, or, as Mario describes it, a "condiment," a term he uses regularly to emphasize that what a pasta is served with is—like ketchup and mustard on your hot dog—never more important than the pasta itself. (And yet it's still very important: Gianni speaks of the erotics of a new ragù as it cooks, filling up the house with its perfume, with a promise of an appetite that will later be satisfied. Actually, what he said was that the cooking of a fresh ragù "*mi fa libidine*"—gives him a hard-on—and until he can eat some he walks around in a condition of high arousal.)

The Bolognese ragù made at Babbo was served with pappardelle, a long, flat noodle, which Gianni and Betta ate when they had dinner there on their first trip to New York, in 1998—Betta noting, dismissively, that the pappardelle was made "with a machine." (Mario had told me of long trips he used to take with Gianni in search of some meal of indisputable regional authenticity—the perfect tortelli filled with autumn pumpkin in Mantua, say; an hour and a half's drive—only to have one bite, recognize that the pasta had been made by a machine rather than by hand, and walk out, dealing with their hunger by grabbing emergency panini in a bar on the drive back home.)

None of this, frankly, meant a lot to me at the pasta station. What mattered was that pappardelle was the easiest order ("Pap!") to prepare, if only because so much of the dish had been sorted out ahead of time and there wasn't a lot that could go wrong. I put two scoops of the ragù in a pan and added water, a dollop of uncooked tomatoes, and some butter—that was it. When the dish was done, I sprinkled on cheese and parsley (referred to as "chiff," for chiffonade, to describe the feathery way it had been chopped). In fact, all the ragù dishes were fairly straightforward. The gnocchi ("Ox!") was served with an oxtail ragù (like a stringy beef stew), the love letters ("Love!") with a lamb-sausage ragù, the orecchiette ("Ork!") with a pork-sausage ragù plus a tongful of broccoli rabe. The problem was in the variations. For instance, to rehydrate the oxtail ragù, you added water and a half scoop of uncooked tomatoes—just as you did with the Bolognese—but no butter. Also, although you sprinkled cheese and parsley on at the end, the parsley was whole leaves, rather than the chopped-up feathery kind. Why? I didn't know why. I still don't know why. To fuck with my head—that's why. And to the lamb-sausage ragù that went with the love letters you added a little water and butter, just like the Bolognese, but no tomato, and then you finished it with cheese, like most of the others, but then mint leaves rather than parsley—after all, the love letters were stuffed with mint and peas. What didn't make sense was the red-chili flakes: you were meant to add these, too. Can you imagine—chili flakes and love letters?

"There's no chili in your love letters," Frankie Langello said. Frankie was the



"I don't want to do something fun for free, I want to do something fun we pay for."

sous-chef at the time. He had tasted the ragù after the dish was plated, but he allowed a runner to carry it into the dining room anyway, because it was going out with three other dishes, and there was no time to prepare a new one without holding up the whole table. But he wasn't happy. "How could you fucking forget the chili—again?"

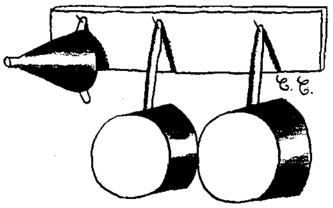
(The kitchen counted on the pasta station's running smoothly, and there wasn't the luxury of having a journalist-tourist, infatuated with the mystique of what he kept referring to as "pasta fresca," unless he was never going to make a mistake. It was an attitude thing. "Did I just burn you?" Frankie asked one night when he was standing next to me, sautéeing a pan of soft-shell crabs, which swell up in the heat until they explode, hurling water and hot oil in unpredictable directions. And, before I could formulate a witty reply, he interrupted me. "Good," he said, and then emptied the leftover oil in his frying pan with such violent recklessness that it splattered on the floor, all over the pasta station, and on me, burning me again.)

Even so, I was learning, even if my education seemed now to consist of lessons in what went with what. For instance, a filled pasta was rarely combined with a ragù, because the pasta itself was a vehicle for ragù (in the belly-button dichotomy, it was an innie); what you put on the outside, therefore, to dress it, was very simple—usually some kind of butter sauce. When Mario was in the kitchen, he called for small amounts of butter in the butter sauces and was always telling the guy at the pasta station to use less. When Mario was not in the kitchen, Andy Nusser, then the executive chef, called for immoderate quantities and was always telling the pasta guy to use more. Once, I protested, until Mark Barrett (the real pasta guy and my coach) shushed me. "Never challenge the person in charge, especially when he's wrong," he said, "or else he'll make your life hell, your night long, and your station miserable. He'll start piling on more orders than you can do. He'll find fault with everything. He'll make you redo dishes that you cooked perfectly the first time."

A butter sauce is an emulsion. "Emulsion" was another term that I only incompletely understood, although I knew enough to know that I was creating one when I added butter to broth to make a meat sauce at home. In the French cookbooks, this was a tricky moment, and great stress was put on everything being exactly right (the broth very hot, the butter very chilled and cut into very small bits, to be incorporated, one by one, into the broth with very steady whisking). The fear was that the emulsion might "break up" (whatever *that* meant). It's different in the restaurant: there you seem to be doing so many things, one after the other, that the thought never occurs to you that one might be trickier than another.

This is what happens. You're told to prepare an order of tortelloni ("Tort!"). You drop eight pieces into a basket bobbing in boiling water. Fresh pasta is less fussy than dried, and the cooking objective is different: you want a food that's soft and yielding rather than one that resists your bite. (The tortelloni take three minutes to cook, but you can leave them in the water for much longer.)

To prepare your sauce, you take a pan (from a stack on a shelf above your head), scoop out a quantity of butter (from a metal container against the wall), and plop it in. (At the station, your space is organized to reduce motion; your hope is never to move your feet.) You then tilt the pan over the pasta water so that you can splash some of the hot water into it, using your tongs. This is something of a finesse movement: dipping the trowel part of the tongs into the boiling water and then flicking it with your wrist so that the water lands in the pan and not on your forearm—which, of course, is where mine regularly arrived (causing it to swell immediately with red welts), unless I missed altogether. I got Mark more than once, startling him every time. (I practiced the flick movement at home until I realized that a big pot of boiling water atop a kitchen burner is really quite tall. It comes up to your chest—a restaurant pasta cooker is around waist level—which makes it much more difficult to splash water into your pan with tongs: the angles are all wrong and, unless you're eight feet tall or normally cook standing on a stool, it's almost impossible to get the pan in the line of the hot-water trajectory. The result was a very wet kitchen. Eventually, I realized that I didn't need to do the tong-flick at home—why not use a spoon?—although it was such a graceful, professional I-know-what-I'm-doing trick that I was reluctant to give it up.)



Next, you add a simple flavor: orange zest for the tortelloni. (For the lune, you add five sage leaves; for the mezzelune, five scallions—the idea is a strong herby or citrus flavor.) You take the pan, which now looks pretty disgusting—a pool of cloudy pasta water, a big lump of butter melting along the rim, and some desiccated orangey twigs—and put it on the flat top (a flat piece of steel on top of full-blast burners) and swirl it. You check the basket: a few tortelloni have risen. You swirl the pan again. With the heat and the movement, the contents are changing: they have become a uniformly colored yellow-orange liquid (yellowish from the butter, orange-ish from the zest), although more soup than sauce. You check your basket: all the tortelloni are floating. You swirl your pan again—almost ready, looking like a custard. But then there are three more orders, and by the time you get back to your pan, thirty seconds later, the liquid is mottled—still a sauce, but a diseased one, very ugly, not something you want to eat. You fix it by giving your pan another tong-flick of water (or, perhaps, a few tong-flicks, until one lands) and return it to the flat top; with one swirl, the mottled texture melts away. You can now remove the pasta basket and tip the tortelloni into the pan. All the splashy water has made the sauce soupy again, so you give the pan a swirl, and then another, until it "tightens" up. You're looking for the moment when the sauce streaks across the surface of the pan, which is when it will stick to the pasta.

This is an emulsion: an agreement between two unlike elements (butter and water), achieved by heat and motion. If you get it slightly wrong—as when the sauce starts to dry out (destroying the balance between the fat and the water)—the unlike elements pull apart, just as they did when they were first plopped in the pan: that's a broken sauce. Sometimes, during slow moments, or when I was waiting for a basket of pasta to cook, I deliberately let my sauce break up and get ugly, so that I could witness its snapping back into condition with a small

COOKING LESSONS

BAD TASTE

In 1974, I moved from Somalia to England on a UNESCO fellowship to do postgraduate work at the University of London. I lived in one of the university's residence halls for a couple of months, but I soon grew tired of my dorm and decided to sublet from an acquaintance who had moved to Rome for half a year. My acquaintance let me have the room for very little money, provided that I feed his cats, look after his parakeets, water his plants according to a rigid timetable he laid down, and, most important, not upset his flatmate, an Englishwoman in her early thirties, who worked in the fashion business.

The Englishwoman was tall, slender, and always strikingly dressed. She had huge eyes, whose dark mysteries I could never work out, yet her voice was surprisingly harsh. The day I moved in, we had barely been introduced when she made a facetious remark to my friend about ethnic cooking, which, she said, "not only can you smell from a mile off but ruins your pots and makes your tummy run." I knew I would have to avoid her as best I could, so I mostly confined myself to my room, remaining there until she was out of the apartment or emerging after she turned in for the night. I seldom cooked, eating out almost every evening—either at the house of an Argentinean friend who lived nearby or at a local restaurant.

A few times, I was invited to dinner parties. I loved the exquisite Sunday roasts a couple of my friends cooked for me, but the meals could be dreadful. English food reminded me of hostel or prison food—at its worst, it was boiled-potato-bland, almost lifeless, and virtually inedible. I missed Somali cooking, which is a blend of Middle Eastern, Italian, and East African cooking, but I dared not prepare "ethnic" dishes in the kitchen I shared with the fashionable Englishwoman.

One evening, however, I overheard her on the phone saying that she would be going away to Cornwall for a long weekend with her boyfriend. There, I thought, I shall invite half a dozen friends over and cook a multicourse meal. I drew up a list and asked my friends to join me on the Saturday. It was my intention to pay homage to all the cuisines I loved: cold Italian appetizers; a mutton dish, prepared in the northern Indian way, with onion, fresh ginger, and whole spices; a yogurt relish to go with the mutton; and chicken cooked with rice in a West African style.

That Saturday, I went shopping. I was back in a taxi with bagfuls of food by about two o'clock in the afternoon. At four, with the oven preheating and all the spices spread out on the kitchen table, I chopped two large onions. After browning them, I put the meat, along with cumin seeds, cinnamon, cardamom, and cloves, in the hot oil. Next, I started on the chicken jollof, first washing the rice and then boiling it along with the chicken. I added onion, tomato, and fresh pepper, before lowering the heat and leaving the dish to simmer. Finally, I prepared two side dishes—the yogurt relish and another, with raw onion, fresh ginger, green chilies, garlic, and lots of lemon. I helped myself to the Englishwoman's cooking oil, her salt, and her black pepper when mine ran out. It was my intention to replace all I had borrowed.

Most of the preparations were finished by six, and the food, in various pots and pans and on platters, sat waiting on the stove. But I still had to buy some wine. Two Italian friends were partial to a red from Liguria, where they had grown up, and there was an off-license a couple of miles away where I would be able to find it. I returned with the wine in time to shave, shower, and change before the first of my guests arrived.

I had been away for no more than an hour, but when I entered the kitchen I discovered that someone had emptied all the food into the dustbin. The lid had been replaced crookedly. The pots and pans were where I had left them, on the stove, but washed and scrubbed clean. I knocked on the Englishwoman's door—no answer. I pushed it open—the room was empty.

I returned to the kitchen, overwhelmed by a sense of my foreignness. For the first time since arriving in England, I wished that I could go back to Mogadishu. But I decided to do nothing rash, and I reserved a table for seven at an Indian restaurant. I phoned my friends, alerting them to the change of venue, where we were to meet and when, but not why.

I avoided the Englishwoman altogether in the subsequent days and eventually moved out of the apartment. A couple of years ago, back in London, I ran into my acquaintance and asked him about the Englishwoman. He told me that she had burst into tears when he demanded an explanation for her action, and he had pressed her no further.

—*Nuruddin Farah*

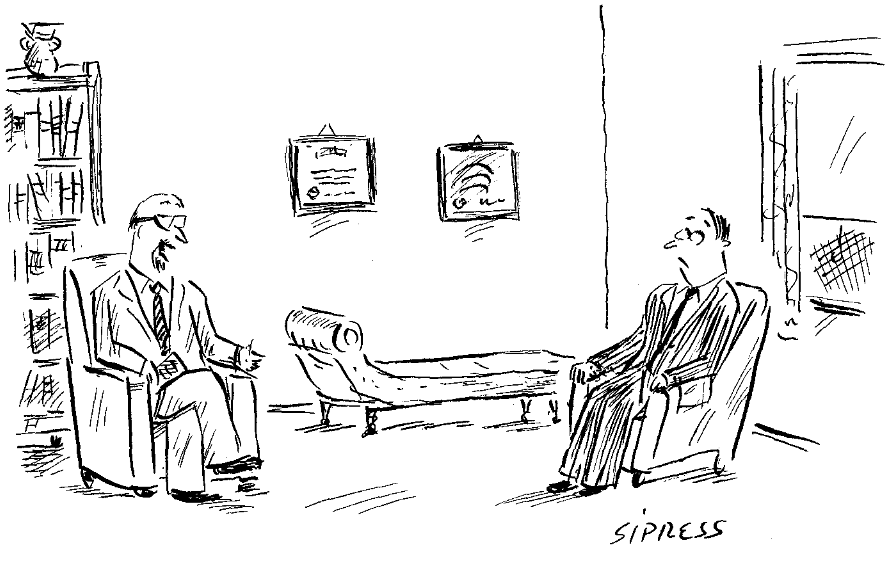
SEYMOUR CHWAST

flick of water. It was like an animated chemistry lesson.

Once, I was caught in mid-reverie. I was making a mushroom sauce that illustrated two things that were characteristic of the station: how to use heat and how to stop it. Like most sauces, this one was prepared in two stages and used only a few ingredients: mushrooms (yellowfoots, although almost any wild mushroom would work); some fresh thyme leaves; a finely chopped shallot; a little butter. To begin, you needed lots of heat. You put your pan on the flat top until it got really hot, until it darkened, and *then* you splashed it with olive oil—the pan went very smoky very quickly—followed by your mushrooms. And then: nothing. You didn't move the pan until, two, three minutes later, you detected the sweet woodsmoke smell of the mushrooms caramelizing. You picked up the pan and peeked at them: the mushrooms had a crunchy, sugary crust—not burned but on the verge of burning. You then sprinkled the pan with the shallots and the thyme, held it until they reacted to the high heat, and then shovelled in enough pasta water to stop the cooking: two, three, four tongfuls, until the pan hissed, steamed, and finally went quiet. That was Stage One: from high heat to no heat. Stage Two was when the order was fired. You retrieved the pan and made an emulsion: the butter, the swirling-swirling routine until the mushroom water became a sauce, sticky enough to adhere to a pasta—pappardelle, normally, but it could be tagliatelle or linguine or even a piece of grilled meat, like a steak. The reverie occurred at the end of Stage One, when I lifted the pan off the flat top and sprinkled it with the thyme. It had become my favorite moment. For a few seconds, nothing happened: the leaves were on the hot metal of the pan, taking in the heat. Then, one by one, they swelled, barely perceptibly, and exploded, a string of tiny explosions, like minuscule pieces of herby popcorn. And with each pop there was an aromatic eruption of thyme. I closed my eyes and put my face into the pan, breathing in the exploding herb leaves. I don't know how long I stood there. "What the fuck are you doing?" I opened my eyes. It was Frankie. "What the fuck are you doing?" He was standing inches from my face. The others were staring at me, and I pictured how I must have looked. "I like the smell of the popping thyme," I said weakly. I was expecting scorn, or a string of profanities, mockery at the very least. Instead, Frankie seemed surprised by my reply and didn't know quite what to say. His face became soft and puppy-dog-like. "Oh, well, then," he said, finally. "That's all right." I think he was embarrassed.

In all these dishes was an ingredient that you can't get at home: the restaurant's pasta water. At the start of the evening, it was perfectly clear (you could see through it to the shiny bottom of the pasta maker) and very salty. ("Like the sea," Mario always said, and then reminded you to keep dipping your finger into the boiling water, tasting it and adjusting it, tasting and adjusting, until it evoked a childhood memory of your first trip to the beach, but I never mastered the quick-dip or, for that matter, thought of my childhood—only that I'd just burned my finger again.) Midway through the service, the shiny bottom of the pasta cooker disappeared. This was the cloudy phase, and about two hours before the muddy one, when the water ceased being normal water and became, instead, an increasingly thick vehicle for soluble starch: yucky-sounding (and yucky-looking), but actually rather miraculous—when the water reached this condition, it behaved like a sauce thickener, binding the elements (and, in effect, flavoring the pasta with the flavor of itself). Even so, there was no escaping that the water the pasta was cooked in at the end of the night was very different from what it had been at, say, six o'clock. Just how different was evident when you finally had to clean the "bitch," as the pasta cooker was called—my task, and an indication of my position in the hierarchy. (Later, it slipped out that, when I wasn't there, I was known as the "kitchen bitch." Nice touch, I thought, as I mulled over the relationship between my status and my end-of-the-day responsibility: the kitchen bitch, cleaning the kitchen's bitch.)

For all that, it was a pretty straightforward contraption. After you removed the pasta baskets, it was just two sinks in a metal stand, and a large, gas-fired heating element. The difficulty was in what you found at the bottom—normally, a richly layered expression of the restaurant's archeology, composed of, say, goat cheese (because the tortelloni were always leaking), butternut squash (because the lune always lost a little as well), and tiny bits of everything else, including, occasionally, shellfish (where did they swim in from?). Also, the cooker was always hot—furnace hot. Even when the heating element was turned off, it remained very hot, and the green abrasive "scrubby" that you used steamed on contact, softened slowly, and eventually started to cook, like a piece of plastic ravioli. (It's not that you get hot, cleaning the bitch; you just don't cool down. You're already very hot, and have been very hot for many hours. I have never been so hot. It would take hours before my body temperature started to drop, and even at four or five in the



"These feelings of yours aren't unusual—in fact, several of them have Web sites."

morning, when I finally went to bed, I continued to radiate heat, my insides a meaty something still cooking, my mind unable to stop the recurrent thought that this was my life: I'd become a sausage.)

Why don't more people use pasta water at home? Sometimes I thought it should be bottled, because there is no way that your home water could ever achieve the starchy viscosity of a restaurant's. (It would be cheap—being liquidy leftovers—and the jar should be very large, probably darkly tinted, like a wine bottle, because there would be no reward in looking too closely at what was floating inside.)

The thought also made me curious about the moment in the history of American cooking when efficiency won out over taste and, instead of using a pair of tongs, and pulling the spaghetti straight out of the pot, people started using a colander (an evil instrument) and letting all that dense, murky rich "water" rush down the drain. The practice is described in the original, 1931 edition of "The Joy of Cooking," in its "Rules for Boiling Spaghetti, Macaroni, Creamettes and Noodles," along with the even more alarming one of taking your colander full of spaghetti (rather mushy, since you've boiled it for an hour), or macaroni (easy to chew, after being boiled for twenty minutes), or creamettes (no longer a supermarket item, alas, but once the essential ingredient in a baked creamette loaf), and rinsing the pasta in cold water—oh, heresy of heresies—just to make sure that there is nothing clinging to it. I hold the author responsible for the many plates of sauce-heavy spaghetti that, as a feature of my own American childhood, were prepared by my mother, who was born two years after the cookbook was published. To be fair to both my mother and the author, a plate of spaghetti with meat sauce remains for me an eternal comfort food, even if the meal was not about the pasta. Still, the cultural disregard for the noodle contributed to my ignorance of it. It also contributed to my prejudice about dried pasta, a prejudice that I finally overcame in the Babbo kitchen, in an epiphany of sorts.

The occasion was an impromptu late-night family meal—two family meals, actually. The first featured a big platter of linguine alle vongole (linguine with clams), which Mark was making for the runners and dishwashers (each one took a plate of the pasta and put a bowl on top to keep it warm, and then hid it behind a pot or underneath a towel—too busy finishing up to eat the food now, but too mistrustful of others to leave it out). The second meal was one that I was preparing, a bowl of steamed cockles, for the restaurant manager and the wine steward (the executives in charge that particular night and entitled, by virtue of their positions, to be served at a table out front).

I'd become curious about the difference between clams and cockles. In practice, the two names are often used interchangeably; at Babbo, they *were* interchangeable, because they were the same shellfish (and came neither from the Mediterranean nor from New England but from New Zealand, every Monday and Thursday morning). These New Zealand "cockle-clams" were small, purple, and round, and prized for their resemblance to the tiny, tasty Italian *veraci* clams, and for their uniformity: no variation in shape, no variation in cooking time, which (with your burner on at full blast) was exactly six minutes, a little less than the six minutes and thirty seconds it took to cook the pasta for the linguine alle vongole, which, as it happened, wasn't actually linguine, which takes nine minutes, but linguine fine (a faster-cooking, fine long flat noodle). Frankly, I hated both shellfish dishes. The preparations were so fussy: one ("Ling!") was started with garlic, red onions, and red-pepper flakes; the other ("Cock!") with garlic, red onions, and slices of a fiery green pepper. (Green pepper? Red pepper? Do you think you'd spot the difference?) One took butter, the other didn't. One took white wine, the other tomato sauce. One finished with parsley, the other with Thai basil. (Why Thai basil? Why does parsley work with New Zealand cockle-clams when they're called clams and served atop pasta but not when they're called cockles and served without it? And, for that matter, why was I preparing cockles anyway: where was the pasta? Why? Why? You know why.) By now, I had flash cards for all the restaurant's preparations, and I lost much of a morning memorizing the supposed and, to my mind, wholly contrived differences between Ling and Cock. It wasn't that I was having trouble remembering which was which—after all, it was the same shellfish in both dishes. I was having trouble doing that instantaneous, unreflected recall required by the pasta station; you got in trouble and fell behind if you switched your pan from your left hand to your right (it took too much time); you got in trouble if you had to look for your tongs; you got in trouble if you ever had to ask or wonder or remember, so you aspired to have everything memorized on such a deep level—like language, or the alphabet, or numbers—that you never found yourself thinking. Also, frankly, I didn't get the point of putting shellfish in pasta. You can't eat the shells, can you? And the eating was all so elaborate; you really needed a bib, an extra plate, a finger bowl, an extra napkin, and an extra quantity of vigilance just to make sure that you didn't stick a shell in your mouth. It seemed a hygienic exercise, like bathing—in any case, not dinner.

I had another realization that night, which arose from my noticing that, when it gets late, the cooking that matters is for the staff, and not for the diners who have just straggled in. Around midnight, the kitchen was something of a demilitarized zone, meant to be closed but still serving food, owing to the insistence of John Mainieri, the maître d', who sometimes accepted late seatings and was openly loathed by some members of the kitchen staff as a result: they hissed at his appearance, whistled, and erupted in a braying chorus of posh-sounding "Hallo!"s. (A distressing thing to witness, not least because I was fond of John.) In general, it is often possible to argue your way into a restaurant just as the kitchen is closing. But I urge you, the next time you find yourself in that position, trying to persuade a maître d' to accommodate you—bowing abjectly and apologizing, citing the traffic, the crowds, a fluent stream of obsequious servility, maybe even a crisp banknote in the man's palm—to recognize that the members of the kitchen know you're there. They are waiting for your order, huddled around the ticker-tape machine, counting the seconds until it appears, and heaping imprecations on your head because you cannot make up your mind. They are speculating—will it be something light, a single course, perhaps? (That's what I would order, someone says, and everyone else loudly agrees.) Will I be able to drain the pasta machine? Will the grill guy be able to turn off the burners? Or will the diners—and the late ones are usually referred to simply as "those fuckers"—be so clueless as to order the five-course tasting menu? It happens, and the response of the kitchen—a bellowing roar of disgust—is so loud that everyone in the restaurant must hear it. By now the kitchen is different. At eleven, beer is allowed, and, for nearly an hour, the cooks have been drinking. The senior figures have disappeared: Andy is downstairs doing something with a computer; Frankie is doing something in the walk-in. No one is in charge. The people remaining are tired and dirty. The floors are greasy and wet—this is when the walk-in door swings open, and someone is suddenly airborne. The pasta machine is so thick and crud-filled that the water has turned purple and is starting to foam. Do you need more details? Let me rephrase the question: Do you think, if your meal is the last order received by the kitchen, that it has been cooked with love?

But then—in the rush to clean up, the washing, scrubbing, mopping; the search for one-quart containers (why are there never enough one-quart containers?); the crash of a falling tray; the speed with which you clear away the food at your station, wrapping up some, throwing away most, including the ingredients needed to cook that tardy, last remaining order (sorry, Jack, that's what you get for showing up so late); the trash talk about the maître d', who has returned to see if there's a family meal; the persistent hunger of the dishwashers (they have nothing at home); the late-night, slightly blurry, slightly drunken frenzy of a kitchen closing up, wanting to be done, wanting to get out—amid all this, I suddenly got the point of pasta with clams.

This is what happened: Mark, having cooked up a large quantity of linguine for its regulation six minutes and thirty seconds, emptied it into a pan of New Zealand cockle-clams, sloppily dripping lots of that starchy water on them in the process, a big wet heap of pasta on top of several dozen shellfish; he swirled the pan, gave it a little flip, swirled it again, and then left it alone so that it could cook, bubbling away, for another half minute. (This was curious, I thought, watching him—you don't normally leave a pan of pasta on the flat top.) Then he took a strand and tasted it. He gave me one. It was not what I expected. It was no longer linguine, exactly; it had changed color and texture and become something else. I tasted it again. This, I thought, is the equivalent of soaking bread in gravy, except it wasn't bread but pasta, and not gravy but a highly flavored sauce. But what was the sauce? I looked at the pan: the cockle-clams had been all closed up a few minutes earlier, and as they cooked their shells opened, and as they opened they released the juices inside—lots of juices. That's what I was tasting in this strand of linguine: an ocean pungency. ("It's about the sauce, not the little snot of meat in the shell," Mario told me later. "No one is interested in the little snot of meat!")

What I had learned in an Italian kitchen was that a meal is about the pasta, not the sauce. But here, in tasting this strand of linguine, I was discovering that it wasn't about either the pasta or the sauce; it was about both, about the interaction between a pasta and a sauce, the result—this new thing, this highly flavored noodle—evocative of a childhood trip to the sea.

The normal, Italian preparation of linguine alle vongole, I have since discovered, is simpler than what is done at Babbo. ("Italians," Mario says, "won't fuck with their fish: there are restaurants that won't use lemon because they think it's excessive.") Mario's partner, Joe Bastianich, pointed out to me that the restaurant uses a few tricks (perhaps refinements?) that you'd never find in Italy. (Joe also recommended using other clams at home—any other clams—rather than the restaurant's perfectly formed, perfectly reliable New Zealand cockle-clams: "But what can you do? You can't run a restaurant that serves the big juicy clams one night, then something else later in the week because your fish guy can't find them anymore.") The tricks include: red-chili flakes (acceptable, especially in Southern Italy), sliced garlic (everywhere), finely chopped red onion (whoa), parsley (a little flashy), plus (and these, simple as they seem, are the radical touches) wine, butter, and thin slivers of pancetta. The only ingredient that is actually measured is the pasta (a serving is four ounces). Everything else is what you can pick up with your fingertips. It's either a small pinch or a large pinch or, well, something in between: not helpful, I know, but that, alas, is the way quantities are measured in a restaurant.

(When a cookbook is prepared, a tester comes to the kitchen, picks up all the ingredients needed to make a dish, and takes them away to translate them into quantities that people at home might recognize. In the foodie publishing world of magazines and books, these testers—who have very white kitchens, with carefully calibrated ovens and computerized weighing devices—are the despots of the written recipe. But I've never been entirely persuaded by the reliability of the translation: either the quantities in the restaurant original are so large that they don't seem right when they're shrunk down—lamb shanks for thirty-four just doesn't look the same when it's done for two; the chemistry is different, the sauce less rich in the reduced version—or the quantities in the original are so small that they don't seem accurate when they're given a specific measurement. Some of the preparations in the Babbo cookbook look unfamiliar to me. For instance, do you really believe that the linguine with eels takes four garlic cloves, that the lobster spaghettini takes two, and that the chitarre takes three? No. It's the same for each: a small pinch. And what happened to the red onions, a feature of the lobster spag—a medium pinch—but not mentioned. Were there no red onions the day the tester arrived? Even so, Mario is the author of the translated quantities in the Babbo cookbook, and I consult it constantly: just that sometimes it seems like a Borges version of the place I worked.)

The downside of the restaurant approach to doing measurements by hand is that, by the end of the evening, your fingertips are stained with the heady perfumes of some of the earth's most powerful aromatics, and you can do nothing to eliminate them. You wash your hands.

You soak them in hot water. You shower, and then scrub your hands again. Even the next day, they stink of raw onion and garlic and pork fat, and, convinced that everyone around you is picking up the smell, you ram them into your pockets, maniacally rubbing your fingers against each other and feeling a little like an obsessive-compulsive Lady Macbeth. (At home, the rule was that, when working the pasta station, I slept with my head at the foot of the bed, while my wife slept in the normal position, an arrangement designed to prevent the recurrence of an earlier mishap, when one of my hands flopped across her face and woke her with a revolting start.)

If you're making linguine with clams at home, you should begin by roasting (small pinches of) the garlic and chili flakes and (medium pinches of) the onion and pancetta in a hot pan with olive oil. Hot oil accelerates the process, and the moment the garlic, chili, onion, and pancetta are soft, you pour the oil away (holding back the contents of the pan with your tongs) and add a slap of butter and a splash of white wine, which stops the cooking. This is Stage One—and you are left with the familiar messy, buttery mush—but already you've added two things that you'd never see in Italy: butter (because it creates an emulsion, but seafood with butter—or cheese, or cream, or any other dairy ingredient—is unusual, if not verging on outright culinary blasphemy) and pancetta, because, according to Mario, pork and shellfish are one of those eternal combinations that you see in many places—in Portugal, for instance, in *amêijoas na cataplana* (clams and ham); or in Spain, in a paella (which often includes chorizo and scallops); or in the United States, in the Italian-American clams casino—even if none of those places happen to be in Italy. In Stage Two, you drop the pasta in the water, then take your messy buttery pan, fill it with a big handful of clams (enough to cover its bottom), and put it on the highest possible flame, the objective being to cook them very fast—they'll start opening after three or four minutes.

As the shells open, you give the pan a swirl, mixing their juices with the buttery porky white-wine emulsion, and pull out the pasta with your tongs—all that starchy pasta water is still a good thing—give it another swirl, flip it, swirl it again, to insure that the pasta is covered by the sauce. If it is looking too dry, you add a splash of pasta water; if too wet, pour some of the liquid out, and then let the thing cook away, for another half minute or so, swirling, swirling, until the sauce starts streaking across the bottom of the pan. At the end, you splash it with fresh olive oil and sprinkle it with parsley: dinner.

"The public is tiring of unfair attacks."

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After I'd worked the pasta station, I was still not satisfied. I knew that a true pasta fresca is made by hand: rolled out by a specially designed wooden rolling pin (called a *matterello*) on an old piece of board, the older and more battered the better. The idea was wood on wood, for extra, ineffable layers of texture and "mouth feel."

I phoned Miriam. I asked if I could work in her kitchen.

"*Certo*," she said. "Phone me when you are next in Italy and come by one afternoon."

This was difficult. I was thinking not of one afternoon but, you know: a week. Or two weeks. Maybe a month.

She panicked. "What? A month? I would never let a stranger in my kitchen for so long a time. An afternoon. O.K., maybe a day. But a month. And, besides, what do you think I can teach you?" she asked, repeating her motto. "I am not an original cook."

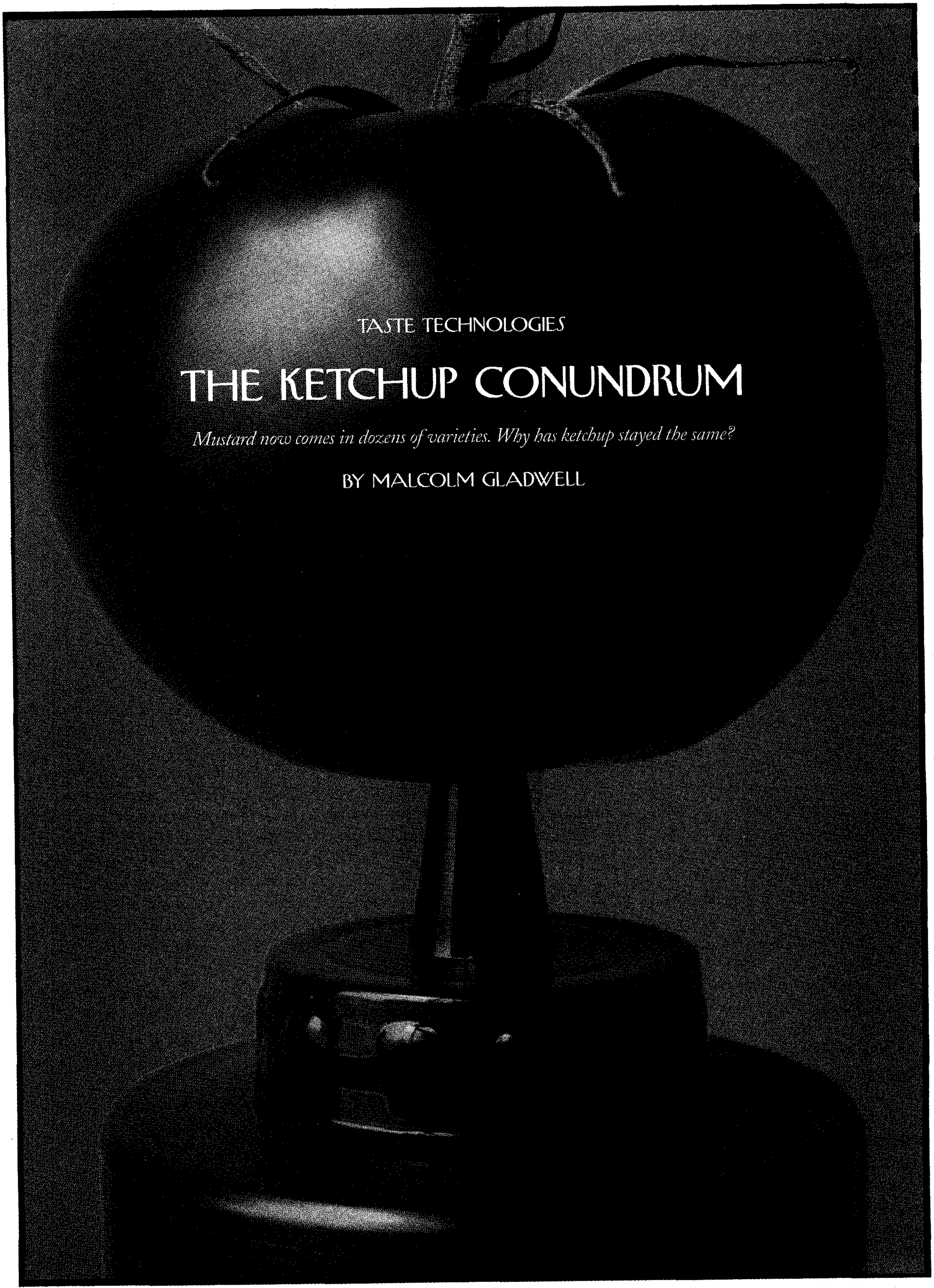
I mentioned the mysteries of pasta fresca, the labors of wood on wood, the elusive know-how of getting the texture, and the thinness of the sheets, just right.

"What in the world are you talking about?" she said. "I have old arms. My old arms cannot do this kind of thing anymore." Besides, she added, she couldn't get a *pastina* anymore.

This was not a term I knew.

A *pastina*, she explained, was one of the local women who made pasta. That was their job: every day, to roll out the sheets. "I always used to be able to get a *pastina*. No one does that sort of thing anymore. They're far too busy. Modern life. I use a machine. I make the dough by hand, and I cut by hand. But I use the machine to roll out the sheets."

A machine? Miriam, my romantic defender of the old, centuries-long, traditional ways of cooking, the living embodiment of Maestro Martino, uses a machine? Maybe, I thought, there was a lesson in that, too. ♦



TASTE TECHNOLOGIES

THE KETCHUP CONUNDRUM

Mustard now comes in dozens of varieties. Why has ketchup stayed the same?

BY MALCOLM GLADWELL

Ketchup triggers, in equal measure, all five of the fundamental tastes; one food theorist calls it "the Esperanto of cuisine."

Many years ago, one mustard dominated the supermarket shelves: French's. It came in a plastic bottle. People used it on hot dogs and bologna. It was a yellow mustard, made from ground white mustard seed with turmeric and vinegar, which gave it a mild, slightly metallic taste. If you looked hard in the grocery store, you might find something in the specialty-foods section called Grey Poupon, which was Dijon mustard, made from the more pungent brown mustard seed. In the early seventies, Grey Poupon was no more than a hundred-thousand-dollar-a-year business. Few people knew what it was or how it tasted, or had any particular desire for an alternative to French's or the runner-up, Gulden's. Then one day the Heublein Company, which owned Grey Poupon, discovered something remarkable: if you gave people a mustard taste test, a significant number had only to try Grey Poupon once to switch from yellow mustard. In the food world that almost never happens; even among the most successful food brands, only about one in a hundred have that kind of conversion rate. Grey Poupon was magic.

So Heublein put Grey Poupon in a bigger glass jar, with an enamelled label and enough of a whiff of Frenchness to make it seem as if it were still being made in Europe (it was made in Hartford, Connecticut, from Canadian mustard seed and white wine). The company ran tasteful print ads in upscale food magazines. They put the mustard in little foil packets and distributed them with airplane meals—which was a brand-new idea at the time. Then they hired the Manhattan ad agency Lowe Marschalk to do something, on a modest budget, for television. The agency came back with an idea: A Rolls-Royce is driving down a country road. There's a man in the back seat in a suit with a plate of beef on a silver tray. He nods to the chauffeur, who opens the glove compartment. Then comes what is known in the business as the "reveal." The chauffeur hands back a jar of Grey Poupon. Another Rolls-Royce pulls up alongside. A man leans his head out the window. "Pardon me. Would you have any Grey Poupon?"

In the cities where the ads ran, sales of Grey Poupon leaped forty to fifty per cent, and whenever Heublein bought airtime in new cities sales jumped by forty to fifty per cent again. Grocery stores put Grey Poupon next to French's and Gulden's. By the end of the nineteen-eighties Grey Poupon was the most powerful brand in mustard. "The tagline in the commercial was that this was one of life's finer pleasures," Larry Elegant, who wrote the original Grey Poupon spot, says, "and that, along with the Rolls-Royce, seemed to impart to people's minds that this was something truly different and superior."

The rise of Grey Poupon proved that the American supermarket shopper was willing to pay more—in this case, $3.99 instead of $1.49 for eight ounces—as long as what they were buying carried with it an air of sophistication and complex aromatics. Its success showed, furthermore, that the boundaries of taste and custom were not fixed: that just because mustard had always been yellow didn't mean that consumers would use only yellow mustard. It is because of Grey Poupon that the standard American supermarket today has an entire mustard section. And it is because of Grey Poupon that a man named Jim Wigon decided, four years ago, to enter the ketchup business. Isn't the ketchup business today exactly where mustard was thirty years ago? There is Heinz and, far behind, Hunt's and Del Monte and a handful of private-label brands. Jim Wigon wanted to create the Grey Poupon of ketchup.

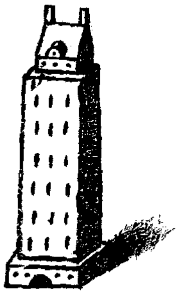
Wigon is from Boston. He's a thickset man in his early fifties, with a full salt-and-pepper beard. He runs his ketchup business—under the brand World's Best Ketchup—out of the catering business of his partner, Nick Schiarizzi, in Norwood, Massachusetts, just off Route 1, in a low-slung building behind an industrial-equipment-rental shop. He starts with red peppers, Spanish onions, garlic, and a high-end tomato paste. Basil is chopped by hand, because the buffalo chopper bruises the leaves. He uses maple syrup, not corn syrup, which gives him a quarter of the sugar of Heinz. He pours his ketchup into a clear glass ten-ounce jar, and sells it for three times the price of Heinz, and for the past few years he has crisscrossed the country, peddling World's Best in six flavors—regular, sweet, dill, garlic, caramelized onion, and basil—to specialty grocery stores and supermarkets. If you were in Zabar's on Manhattan's Upper West Side a few months ago, you would have seen him at the front of the store, in a spot between the sushi and the gefilte fish. He was wearing a World's Best baseball cap, a white shirt, and a red-stained apron. In front of him, on a small table, was a silver tureen filled with miniature chicken and beef meatballs, a box of toothpicks, and a dozen or so open jars of his ketchup. "Try my ketchup!" Wigon said, over and over, to anyone who passed. "If you don't try it, you're doomed to eat Heinz the rest of your life."

In the same aisle at Zabar's that day two other demonstrations were going on, so that people were starting at one end with free chicken sausage, sampling a slice of prosciutto, and then pausing at the World's Best stand before heading for the cash register. They would look down at the array of open jars, and Wigon would impale a meatball on a toothpick, dip it in one of his ketchups, and hand it to them with a flourish. The ratio of tomato solids to liquid in World's Best is much higher than in Heinz, and the maple syrup gives it an unmistakable sweet kick. Invariably, people would close their eyes, just for a moment, and do a subtle double take. Some of them would look slightly perplexed and walk away, and others would nod and pick up a jar. "You know why you like it so much?" he would say, in his broad Boston accent, to the customers who seemed most impressed. "Because you've been eating bad ketchup all your life!" Jim Wigon had a simple vision: build a better ketchup—the way Grey Poupon built a better mustard—and the world will beat a path to your door. If only it were that easy.

The story of World's Best Ketchup cannot properly be told without a man from White Plains, New York, named Howard Moskowitz. Moskowitz is sixty, short and round, with graying hair and huge gold-rimmed glasses. When he talks, he favors the Socratic monologue—a series of questions that he poses to himself, then

RUVEN AFANADOR

answers, punctuated by "ahhh" and much vigorous nodding. He is a lineal descendant of the legendary eighteenth-century Hasidic rabbi known as the Seer of Lublin. He keeps a parrot. At Harvard, he wrote his doctoral dissertation on psychophysics, and all the rooms on the ground floor of his food-testing and market-research business are named after famous psychophysicists. ("Have you ever heard of the name Rose Marie Pangborn? Ahhh. She was a professor at Davis. Very famous. This is the Pangborn kitchen.") Moskowitz is a man of uncommon exuberance and persuasiveness: if he had been your freshman statistics professor, you would today be a statistician. "My favorite writer? Gibbon," he burst out, when we met not long ago. He had just been holding forth on the subject of sodium solutions. "Right now I'm working my way through the Hales history of the Byzantine Empire. Holy shit! Everything is easy until you get to the Byzantine Empire. It's impossible. One emperor is always killing the others, and everyone has five wives or three husbands. It's very Byzantine."



Moskowitz set up shop in the seventies, and one of his first clients was Pepsi. The artificial sweetener aspartame had just become available, and Pepsi wanted Moskowitz to figure out the perfect amount of sweetener for a can of Diet Pepsi. Pepsi knew that anything below eight per cent sweetness was not sweet enough and anything over twelve per cent was too sweet. So Moskowitz did the logical thing. He made up experimental batches of Diet Pepsi with every conceivable degree of sweetness—8 per cent, 8.25 per cent, 8.5, and on and on up to 12—gave them to hundreds of people, and looked for the concentration that people liked the most. But the data were a mess—there wasn't a pattern—and one day, sitting in a diner, Moskowitz realized why. They had been asking the wrong question. There was no such thing as the perfect Diet Pepsi. They should have been looking for the perfect Diet Pepsis.

It took a long time for the food world to catch up with Howard Moskowitz. He knocked on doors and tried to explain his idea about the plural nature of perfection, and no one answered. He spoke at food-industry conferences, and audiences shrugged. But he could think of nothing else. "It's like that Yiddish expression," he says. "Do you know it? To a worm in horseradish, the world is horseradish!" Then, in 1986, he got a call from the Campbell's Soup Company. They were in the spaghetti-sauce business, going up against Ragú with their Prego brand. Prego was a little thicker than Ragú, with diced tomatoes as opposed to Ragú's purée, and, Campbell's thought, had better pasta adherence. But, for all that, Prego was in a slump, and Campbell's was desperate for new ideas.

Standard practice in the food industry would have been to convene a focus group and ask spaghetti eaters what they wanted. But Moskowitz does not believe that consumers—even spaghetti lovers—know what they desire if what they desire does not yet exist. "The mind," as Moskowitz is fond of saying, "knows not what the tongue wants." Instead, working with the Campbell's kitchens, he came up with forty-five varieties of spaghetti sauce. These were designed to differ in every conceivable way: spiciness, sweetness, tartness, saltiness, thickness, aroma, mouth feel, cost of ingredients, and so forth. He had a trained panel of food tasters analyze each of those varieties in depth. Then he took the prototypes on the road—to New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Jacksonville—and asked people in groups of twenty-five to eat between eight and ten small bowls of different spaghetti sauces over two hours and rate them on a scale of one to a hundred. When Moskowitz charted the results, he saw that everyone had a slightly different definition of what a perfect spaghetti sauce tasted like. If you sifted carefully through the data, though, you could find patterns, and Moskowitz learned that most people's preferences fell into one of three broad groups: plain, spicy, and extra-chunky, and of those three the last was the most important. Why? Because at the time there was no extra-chunky spaghetti sauce in the supermarket. Over the next decade, that new category proved to be worth hundreds of millions of dollars to Prego. "We all said, 'Wow!' " Monica Wood, who was then the head of market research for Campbell's, recalls. "Here there was this third segment—people who liked their spaghetti sauce with lots of stuff in it—and it was completely untapped. So in about 1989-90 we launched Prego extra-chunky. It was extraordinarily successful."

It may be hard today, fifteen years later—when every brand seems to come in multiple varieties—to appreciate how much of a breakthrough this was. In those years, people in the food industry carried around in their heads the notion of a platonic dish—the version of a dish that looked and tasted absolutely right. At Ragú and Prego, they had been striving for the platonic spaghetti sauce, and the platonic spaghetti sauce was thin and blended because that's the way they thought it was done in Italy. Cooking, on the industrial level, was consumed with the search for human universals. Once you start looking for the sources of human variability, though, the old orthodoxy goes out the window. Howard Moskowitz stood up to the Platonists and said there are no universals.

Moskowitz still has a version of the computer model he used for Prego fifteen years ago. It has all the coded results from the consumer taste tests and the expert tastings, split into the three categories (plain, spicy, and extra-chunky) and linked up with the actual ingredients list on a spreadsheet. "You know how they have a computer model for building an aircraft," Moskowitz said as he pulled up the program on his computer. "This is a model for building spaghetti sauce. Look, every variable is here." He pointed at column after column of ratings. "So here are the ingredients. I'm a brand manager for Prego. I want to optimize one of the segments. Let's start with Segment 1." In Moskowitz's program, the three spaghetti-sauce groups were labelled Segment 1, Segment 2, and Segment 3. He typed in a few commands, instructing the computer to give him the formulation that would score the highest with those people in Segment 1. The answer appeared almost immediately: a specific recipe that, according to Moskowitz's data, produced a score of 78 from the people in Segment 1. But that same formulation didn't do nearly as well with those in Segment 2 and Segment 3. They scored it 67 and 57, respectively. Moskowitz started again, this time asking the computer to optimize for Segment 2. This time the ratings came in at 82, but now Segment 1 had fallen ten points, to 68. "See what happens?" he said. "If I make one group happier, I piss off another group. We did this for coffee with General Foods, and we found that if you create only one product the best you can get across all the segments is a 60—if you're lucky. That's if you were to treat everybody as one big happy family. But if I do the sensory segmentation, I can get 70, 71, 72. Is that big? Ahhh. It's a very big difference. In coffee, a 71 is something you'll die for."

When Jim Wigon set up shop that day in Zabar's, then, his operating assumption was that there ought to be some segment of the population that preferred a ketchup made with Stanislaus tomato paste and hand-chopped basil and maple syrup. That's the Moskowitz theory. But there is theory and there is practice. By the end of that long day, Wigon had sold ninety jars. But he'd also got two parking tickets and had to pay for a hotel room, so he wasn't going home with money in his pocket. For the year, Wigon estimates, he'll sell fifty thousand jars—which, in the universe of condiments, is no more than a blip. "I haven't drawn a paycheck in five years," Wigon said as he impaled another meatball on a toothpick. "My wife is killing me." And it isn't just World's Best that is struggling. In the gourmet-ketchup world, there is River Run and Uncle Dave's, from Vermont, and Muir Glen Organic and Mrs. Tomato Head Roasted Garlic Peppercorn Catsup, in California, and dozens of others—and every year Heinz's overwhelming share of the ketchup market just grows.

It is possible, of course, that ketchup is waiting for its own version of that Rolls-Royce commercial, or the discovery of the ketchup equivalent of extra-chunky—the magic formula that will satisfy an unmet need. It is also possible, however, that the rules of Howard Moskowitz, which apply to Grey Poupon and Prego spaghetti sauce and to olive oil and salad dressing and virtually everything else in the supermarket, don't apply to ketchup.

Tomato ketchup is a nineteenth-century creation—the union of the English tradition of fruit and vegetable sauces and the growing American infatuation with the tomato. But what we know today as ketchup emerged out of a debate that raged in the first years of the last century over benzoate, a preservative widely used in late-nineteenth-century condiments. Harvey Washington Wiley, the chief of the Bureau of Chemistry in the Department of Agriculture from 1883 to 1912, came to believe that benzoates were not safe, and the result was an argument that split the

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ALL YOU SHOULDN'T EAT $9.97

ketchup world in half. On one side was the ketchup establishment, which believed that it was impossible to make ketchup without benzoate and that benzoate was not harmful in the amounts used. On the other side was a renegade band of ketchup manufacturers, who believed that the preservative puzzle could be solved with the application of culinary science. The dominant nineteenth-century ketchups were thin and watery, in part because they were made from unripe tomatoes, which are low in the complex carbohydrates known as pectin, which add body to a sauce. But what if you made ketchup from ripe tomatoes, giving it the density it needed to resist degradation? Nineteenth-century ketchups had a strong tomato taste, with just a light vinegar touch. The renegades argued that by greatly increasing the amount of vinegar, in effect protecting the tomatoes by pickling them, they were making a superior ketchup: safer, purer, and better tasting. They offered a money-back guarantee in the event of spoilage. They charged more for their product, convinced that the public would pay more for a better ketchup, and they were right. The benzoate ketchups disappeared. The leader of the renegade band was an entrepreneur out of Pittsburgh named Henry J. Heinz.

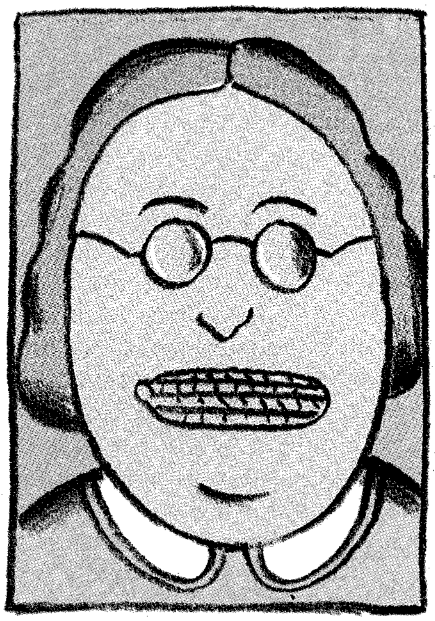
The world's leading expert on ketchup's early years is Andrew F. Smith, a substantial man, well over six feet, with a graying mustache and short wavy black hair. Smith is a scholar, trained as a political scientist, intent on bringing rigor to the world of food. When we met for lunch not long ago at the restaurant Savoy in SoHo (chosen because of the excellence of its hamburger and French fries, and because Savoy makes its own ketchup—a dark, peppery, and viscous variety served in a white porcelain saucer), Smith was in the throes of examining the origins of the croissant for the upcoming "Oxford Encyclopedia of Food and Drink in America," of which he is the editor-in-chief. Was the croissant invented in 1683, by the Viennese, in celebration of their defeat of the invading Turks? Or in 1686, by the residents of Budapest, to celebrate *their* defeat of the Turks? Both explanations would explain its distinctive crescent shape—since it would make a certain cultural sense (particularly for the Viennese) to consecrate their battlefield triumphs in the form of pastry. But the only reference Smith could find to either story was in the Larousse Gastronomique of 1938. "It just doesn't check out," he said, shaking his head wearily.

Smith's specialty is the tomato, however, and over the course of many scholarly articles and books—"The History of Home-Made Anglo-American Tomato Ketchup," for *Petits Propos Culinaires,* for example, and "The Great Tomato Pill War of the 1830's," for *The Connecticut Historical Society Bulletin*—Smith has argued that some critical portion of the history of culinary civilization could be told through this fruit. Cortez brought tomatoes to Europe from the New World, and they inexorably insinuated themselves into the world's cuisines. The Italians substituted the tomato for eggplant. In northern India, it went into curries and chutneys. "The biggest tomato producer in the world today?" Smith paused, for dramatic effect. "China. You don't think of tomato being a part of Chinese cuisine, and it wasn't ten years ago. But it is now." Smith dipped one of my French fries into the homemade sauce. "It has that raw taste," he said, with a look of intense concentration. "It's fresh ketchup. You can taste the tomato." Ketchup was, to his mind, the most nearly perfect of all the tomato's manifestations. It was inexpensive, which meant that it had a firm lock on the mass market, and it was a condiment, not an ingredient, which meant that it could be applied at the discretion of the food eater, not the food preparer. "There's a quote from Elizabeth Rozin I've always loved," he said. Rozin is the food theorist who wrote the essay "Ketchup and the Collective Unconscious," and Smith used her conclusion as the epigraph of his ketchup book: ketchup may well be "the only true culinary expression of the melting pot, and . . . its special and unprecedented ability to provide something for everyone makes it the Esperanto of cuisine." Here is where Henry Heinz and the benzoate battle were so important: in defeating the condiment Old Guard, he was the one who changed the flavor of ketchup in a way that made it universal.

There are five known fundamental tastes in the human palate: salty, sweet, sour, bitter, and umami. Umami is the proteiny, full-bodied taste of chicken soup, or cured meat, or fish stock, or aged cheese, or mother's milk, or soy sauce, or mushrooms, or seaweed, or cooked tomato. "Umami adds body," Gary Beauchamp, who heads the Monell Chemical Senses Center, in Philadelphia, says. "If you add it to a soup, it makes the soup seem like it's thicker—it gives it sensory heft. It turns a soup from salt water into a food." When Heinz moved to ripe tomatoes and increased the percentage of tomato solids, he made ketchup, first and foremost, a potent source of umami. Then he dramatically increased the concentration of vinegar, so that his ketchup had twice the acidity of most other ketchups; now ketchup was sour, another of the fundamental tastes. The post-benzoate ketchups also doubled the concentration of sugar—so now ketchup was also sweet—and all along ketchup had been salty and bitter. These are not trivial issues. Give a baby soup, and then soup with MSG (an amino-acid salt that is pure umami), and the baby will go back for the MSG soup every time, the same way a baby will always prefer water with sugar to water alone. Salt and sugar and umami are primal signals about the food we are eating—about how dense it is in calories, for example, or, in the case of umami, about the presence of proteins and amino acids. What Heinz had done was come up with a condiment that pushed all five of these primal buttons. The taste of Heinz's ketchup began at the tip of the tongue, where our receptors for sweet and salty first appear, moved along the sides, where sour notes seem the strongest, then hit the back of the tongue, for umami and bitter, in one long crescendo. How many things in the supermarket run the sensory spectrum like this?

A number of years ago, the H. J. Heinz Company did an extensive market-research project in which researchers went into people's homes and watched the way they used ketchup. "I remem-

SWEET CORN



SEYMOUR CHWAST

In 1947, the rural electrification initiatives of the New Deal finally staggered up to the farmhouse in Polk County, North Carolina, where my grandmother Clara Mae Ledbetter lived with my grandfather, their three children, his parents, and a constantly rotating assortment of spinster aunts and decrepit bachelor uncles. Within days of the lights coming on, travelling appliance salesmen, following the newly strung power lines, began pulling into the yard in mud-spattered, late-model cars. Soon Granny owned an Electrolux vacuum cleaner (which she did not need), a Maytag wringer washer (which she did), and a squat Frigidaire refrigerator, whose spacious freezer compartment proved to be the single tool she needed to establish herself as a genius, at least among the handful of farm families that orbited Rock Springs Baptist Church.

The miracle of an electric freezer allowed Granny to "put up" corn for consumption all year long, to preserve those glorious few days in late summer when the sugar level in certain varieties of newly ripened corn approaches the narcotic. I've seen more than one person close his eyes and moan upon tasting a mouthful of Granny's corn. My great-grandfather, I'm told, began to demand it for breakfast once the freezer assured him of an adequate supply. Mobs with paper plates formed around it at church picnics, impatiently waiting for the preacher to finish the blessing. In short, my grandmother's corn was the single best-tasting food I've ever put into my mouth, or ever expect to.

Cut from the cob and frozen in plastic pint containers, Granny's corn resembled the common creamed corn you might find in a school cafeteria, but it contained neither added sugar nor milk. As with any work of art, the qualities that made it extraordinary remain steadfastly ineffable. You can mimic the motions that she used to conjure up her masterpiece, but not the results. Granny planted a certain variety of corn (always Golden Queen) in a certain red-dirt upland field, and hoed, fertilized, and harvested it according to accepted gardening practices. The techniques she used to prepare the corn for the freezer, and later to cook it, also met community norms.

The secret of Granny's corn, I suspect, lies instead somewhere in the patience and labor that it took to produce even a single helping. At her peak, Granny was never able to put up more than sixty or so ears a day. She pulled the corn in the morning, as soon as it was light enough to see. (My father says that early morning is the time when the sugar content of the ears is highest, but Granny did this primarily because she wanted to get the corn, which she had to cook in a kitchen without air-conditioning, into the freezer before the heat of the day set in.) After shucking the ears, removing the silk with an old toothbrush, and washing them, she blanched the corn by boiling it for three minutes, then dropping it into a pan of ice water. She made sure that she cut and scraped only the sweetest parts—the tips of the individual kernels and the pulp inside—from the cob. The husks of the kernels she left behind. Five dozen roasting ears generally yielded only ten pints of Granny's corn. If the whole family came to dinner, it took five pints to feed us.

Granny moved into the farmhouse at Rock Springs when she was a nineteen-year-old bride, in 1933, and lived there until December, 2002, when she fell and broke her hip at the church Christmas pageant. She has resided since then in an assisted-living facility. When I visit her now, she talks mainly about returning home, though she knows that she isn't likely to. What she misses most is the work. She still marks time by the seasons of labor that she followed for almost seventy years—when to break ground in the garden, when to plant or harvest each vegetable, when to can green beans or tomato juice, or freeze peaches or field peas. Though she found solace in the work itself, her labor always resulted in comfort or pleasure or sustenance for someone else as well: a clean house, daffodils or irises or lilies blooming in the yard, a steaming bowl of corn circling the big table in the dining room during Sunday dinner. The only praise one usually receives for such a life is necessarily local and private, though in a perfect world perhaps it wouldn't be. The last time I tasted my grandmother's corn was Thanksgiving, 2002, and I took it for granted that there would be another bowl come Christmas. I could not have said so at the time, but I now realize that love, in its most selfless form, tastes like sweet corn made by an old woman working at daybreak, during the hottest part of the summer.

—*Tony Earley*

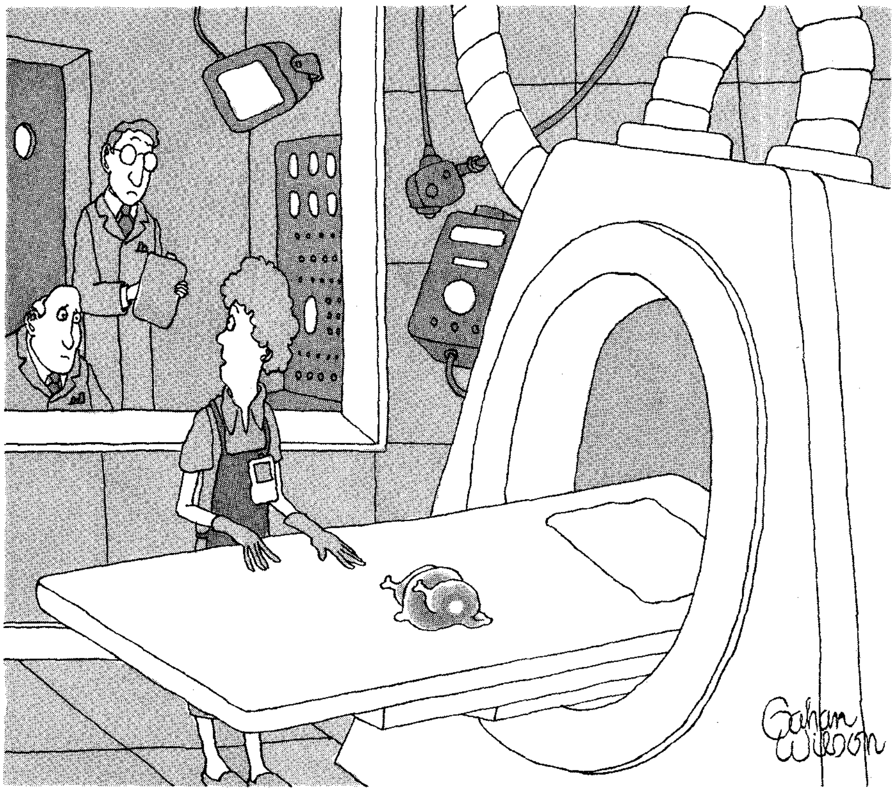
ber sitting in one of those households," Casey Keller, who was until recently the chief growth officer for Heinz, says. "There was a three-year-old and a six-year-old, and what happened was that the kids asked for ketchup and Mom brought it out. It was a forty-ounce bottle. And the three-year-old went to grab it himself, and Mom intercepted the bottle and said, 'No, you're not going to do that.' She physically took the bottle away and doled out a little dollop. You could see that the whole thing was a bummer." For Heinz, Keller says, that moment was an epiphany. A typical five-year-old consumes about sixty per cent more ketchup than a typical forty-year-old, and the company realized that it needed to put ketchup in a bottle that a toddler could control. "If you are four—and I have a four-year-old—he doesn't get to choose what he eats for dinner, in most cases," Keller says. "But the one thing he can control is ketchup. It's the one part of the food experience that he can customize and personalize." As a result, Heinz came out with the so-called EZ Squirt bottle, made out of soft plastic with a conical nozzle. In homes where the EZ Squirt is used, ketchup consumption has grown by as much as twelve per cent.

There is another lesson in that household scene, though. Small children tend to be neophobic: once they hit two or three, they shrink from new tastes. That makes sense, evolutionarily, because through much of human history that is the age at which children would have first begun to gather and forage for themselves, and those who strayed from what was known and trusted would never have survived. There the three-year-old was, confronted with something strange on his plate—tuna fish, perhaps, or Brussels sprouts—and he wanted to alter his food in some way that made the unfamiliar familiar. He wanted to subdue the contents of his plate. And so he turned to ketchup, because, alone among the condiments on the table, ketchup could deliver sweet and sour and salty and bitter and umami, all at once.

Last February, Edgar Chambers IV, who runs the sensory-analysis center at Kansas State University, conducted a joint assessment of World's Best and Heinz. He has seventeen trained tasters on his staff, and they work for academia and industry, answering the often difficult question of what a given substance tastes like. It is demanding work. Immediately after conducting the ketchup study, Chambers dispatched a team to Bangkok to do an analysis of fruit—bananas, mangoes, rose apples, and sweet tamarind. Others were detailed to soy and kimchi in South Korea, and Chambers's wife led a delegation to Italy to analyze ice cream.

The ketchup tasting took place over four hours, on two consecutive mornings. Six tasters sat around a large, round table with a lazy Susan in the middle. In front of each panelist were two one-ounce cups, one filled with Heinz ketchup and one filled with World's Best. They would work along fourteen dimensions of flavor and texture, in accordance with the standard fifteen-point scale used by the food world. The flavor components would be divided two ways: elements picked up by the tongue and elements picked up by the nose. A very ripe peach, for example, tastes sweet but it also smells sweet—which is a very different aspect of sweetness. Vinegar has a sour taste but also a pungency, a vapor that rises up the back of the nose and fills the mouth when you breathe out. To aid in the rating process, the tasters surrounded themselves with little bowls of sweet and sour and salty solutions, and portions of Contadina tomato paste, Hunt's tomato sauce, and Campbell's tomato juice, all of which represent different concentrations of tomato-ness.

After breaking the ketchup down into its component parts, the testers assessed the critical dimension of "amplitude," the word sensory experts use to describe flavors that are well blended and balanced, that "bloom" in the mouth. "The difference between high and low amplitude is the difference between my son and a great pianist playing 'Ode to Joy' on the piano," Chambers says. "They are playing the same notes, but they blend better with the great pianist." Pepperidge Farm shortbread cookies are considered to have high amplitude. So are Hellman's mayonnaise and Sara Lee poundcake. When something is high in amplitude, all its constituent elements converge into a single gestalt. You can't isolate the ele-



"The machine's done something really weird to Mr. Hendrickson."

ments of an iconic, high-amplitude flavor like Coca-Cola or Pepsi. But you can with one of those private-label colas that you get in the supermarket. "The thing about Coke and Pepsi is that they are absolutely gorgeous," Judy Heylmun, a vice-president of Sensory Spectrum, Inc., in Chatham, New Jersey, says. "They have beautiful notes—all flavors are in balance. It's very hard to do that well. Usually, when you taste a store cola it's"— and here she made a series of *pik! pik! pik!* sounds—"all the notes are kind of spiky, and usually the citrus is the first thing to spike out. And then the cinnamon. Citrus and brown spice notes are top notes and very volatile, as opposed to vanilla, which is very dark and deep. A really cheap store brand will have a big, fat cinnamon note sitting on top of everything."

Some of the cheaper ketchups are the same way. Ketchup aficionados say that there's a disquieting unevenness to the tomato notes in Del Monte ketchup: Tomatoes vary, in acidity and sweetness and the ratio of solids to liquid, according to the seed variety used, the time of year they are harvested, the soil in which they are grown, and the weather during the growing season. Unless all those variables are tightly controlled, one batch of ketchup can end up too watery and another can be too strong. Or try one of the numerous private-label brands that make up the bottom of the ketchup market and pay attention to the spice mix; you may well find yourself conscious of the clove note or overwhelmed by a hit of garlic. Generic colas and ketchups have what Moskowitz calls a hook—a sensory attribute that you can single out, and ultimately tire of.

The tasting began with a plastic spoon. Upon consideration, it was decided that the analysis would be helped if the ketchups were tasted on French fries, so a batch of fries were cooked up, and distributed around the table. Each tester, according to protocol, took the fries one by one, dipped them into the cup—all the way, right to the bottom—bit off the portion covered in ketchup, and then contemplated the evidence of their senses. For Heinz, the critical flavor components—vinegar, salt, tomato I.D. (over-all tomato-ness), sweet, and bitter—were judged to be present in roughly equal concentrations, and those elements, in turn, were judged to be well blended. The World's Best, though, "had a completely different view, a different profile, from the Heinz," Chambers said. It had a much stronger hit of sweet aromatics—4.0 to 2.5—and outstripped Heinz on tomato I.D. by a resounding 9 to 5.5. But there was less salt, and no discernible vinegar. "The other comment from the panel was that these elements were really not blended at all," Chambers went on. "The World's Best product had really low amplitude." According to Joyce Buchholz, one of the panelists, when the group judged aftertaste, "it seemed like a certain flavor would hang over longer in the case of World's Best—that cooked-tomatoey flavor."

"Love the tie, Chad—that is so pimp!"

But what was Jim Wigon to do? To compete against Heinz, he had to try something dramatic, like substituting maple syrup for corn syrup, ramping up the tomato solids. That made for an unusual and daring flavor. World's Best Dill ketchup on fried catfish, for instance, is a marvellous thing. But it also meant that his ketchup wasn't as sensorily complete as Heinz, and he was paying a heavy price in amplitude. "Our conclusion was mainly this," Buchholz said. "We felt that World's Best seemed to be more like a sauce." She was trying to be helpful.

There is an exception, then, to the Moskowitz rule. Today there are thirty-six varieties of Ragú spaghetti sauce, under six rubrics—Old World Style, Chunky Garden Style, Robusto, Light, Cheese Creations, and Rich & Meaty—which means that there is very nearly an optimal spaghetti sauce for every man, woman, and child in America. Measured against the monotony that confronted Howard Moskowitz twenty years ago, this is progress. Happiness, in one sense, is a function of how closely our world conforms to the infinite variety of human preference. But that makes it easy to forget that sometimes happiness can be found in having what we've always had and everyone else is having. "Back in the seventies, someone else—I think it was Ragú—tried to do an 'Italian'-style ketchup," Moskowitz said. "They failed miserably." It was a conundrum: what was true about a yellow condiment that went on hot dogs was not true about a tomato condiment that went on hamburgers, and what was true about tomato sauce when you added visible solids and put it in a jar was somehow not true about tomato sauce when you added vinegar and sugar and put it in a bottle. Moskowitz shrugged. "I guess ketchup is ketchup." ♦

ANNALS OF AGRICULTURE

SALAD DAYS

How a lowly leaf became a high-end delicacy.

BY BURKHARD BILGER

Doucette, they called it, the sweet little one, and its lack of cultivation was half its charm. It was a slender, diminutive thing—so lowborn that it came clean only after repeated washings—but it had strong roots and surprising snap, and a certain native, untutored delicacy. Alexandre Dumas found it "very tender and very tasty," and Thomas Jefferson always kept a place for it at Monticello. Balzac wrote parts for it in his novels, and the great food writer Waverly Root warned against dressing it too finely, lest its "modest, subtle, seductive, and caressing" character be compromised. Even its admirers admitted that it was still a bit wild: an unimproved little weed that no one had ever bothered to take in hand. But they liked it well enough as it was.

"It's beautiful," Todd Koons told me one evening. "But it's a little leggy." We were sitting in a restaurant on a lamp-lit side street in Carmel, California. Koons, who is forty-four, was wearing a cream linen shirt with the sleeves rolled up, and, like a lot of people in Carmel, he looked as if he'd just had a long, relaxing mud bath. He had burnished skin and sun-bleached hair, loose shoulders, and an easy, half-mocking smile. Peering intently at his salad bowl, he reached in with his thumb and forefinger and lifted out a sprig of doucette, or mâche, as it's now commonly known in the United States. Its eight spoon-shaped leaves were clustered in a perfect rosette, but Koons wasn't impressed. "It's too big and it's overdressed," he said. "Ideally, there would be just six leaves, and the whole thing would fit in your mouth." He shook his head and sighed, then ate the mâche anyway. "One of my most valuable lessons has been that I am not my salad," he said. "I am not my mâche. Just because my mâche is having a bad day doesn't mean I have to have a bad day."

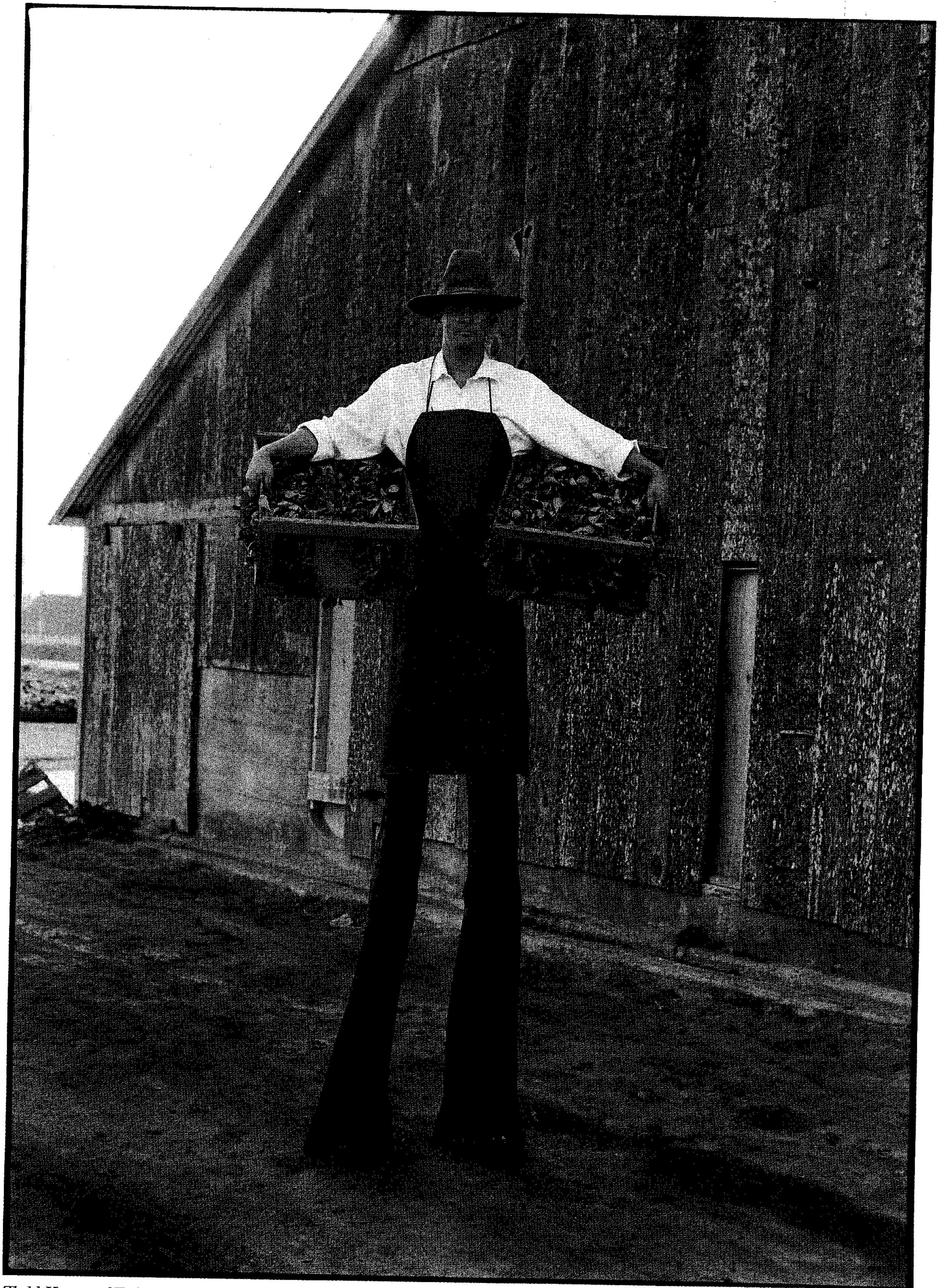
Koons is a farmer, an entrepreneur, and the president of a produce company called Epic Roots. He has been called the Johnny Appleseed of salad, but he's more like its Colonel Tom Parker: he takes obscure country greens and grooms them for mass consumption. He first came across mâche as a young boy in Oregon, living on a small hippie farm near Eugene. His parents were artists and epicures—a rare combination in the nineteen-seventies—who worked with stained glass and raised their own rabbits and vegetables. Dinners were long, talky affairs lit by kerosene lamps, often with other artists and intellectuals around the table, and Todd was in charge of the salads. At first, he didn't really notice the mâche—its taste was too subtle to stand out among the other greens. But one visitor almost certainly did. Alice Waters, the owner of Chez Panisse, in Berkeley, came to dinner in 1975 as the guest of a local art patron and gourmet. Afterward, when she heard who had made the salad, she teasingly invited Koons to come see her when he finished high school. Three years later, at the age of eighteen, he showed up and asked for a job.

Chez Panisse was, of course, the wellspring of a new kind of American cooking in those years. Waters, who opened the restaurant in 1971, when she was twenty-seven years old, reminded a generation of chefs of the virtues of fresh, local, seasonal produce, and salad was her prime proselytizing tool. In the late seventies, when three-quarters of the lettuce sold in this country was still iceberg, Waters was serving organic mesclun—a spicy bramble of leaves from a dozen or more kinds of plants, flanked by rounds of baked goat cheese, which was considered equally exotic. "That was the salad that changed America," the restaurant consultant Clark Wolf told me recently. "It taught us that greens aren't necessarily bland and wilting, that they can be peppery and sweet and nutty and creamy. It taught us that they can make a different dish in every season, as the crops and flavors change. And, once we knew that, it changed the way we felt about everything. If salad wasn't just iceberg with a slice of radish on top, then what about other vegetables? What about chickens and cheese and milk and grains?"

In the years since Chez Panisse opened, American produce has been virtually reinvented. Organic vegetables can be bought at Piggly Wiggly, and last year McDonald's sold a hundred and fifty million "spring mix" salads—their drastically simplified version of mesclun. Bagged salads, featuring plants that people once attacked with hoes and herbicides, are a two-and-a-half-billion-dollar industry. Koons and Waters have been central figures in this revolution. For a few years after he arrived at Chez Panisse, they also dated. But in recent years they've taken organic farming down radically diverging paths. While Waters has continued to preach "slow food" and small farms, Koons has focussed on broadening the repertoire of industrial agriculture. Mâche is his latest protégé. If he was slow to appreciate it at first, he has come to think of it as the perfect salad green: sophisticated enough for gourmets yet amiable enough for a truck-stop diner. The French grow fifty million pounds of it a year, and Koons believes that Americans could consume four times as much. "It's going to be big," he says. "It's going to be a mother."

First, though, it must be made to coöperate. Like a lot of salad greens, mâche is more than a little passive-aggressive. It will agree to grow most anywhere, just not particularly well. It's native to the Alps, so to withstand the California sun it must be kept in shade at all times, like some pale Victorian beauty. When picked fresh in the wild, it's subtle and complex, with a faint taste

RUVEN AFANADOR



Todd Koons, of Epic Roots, has been called the Johnny Appleseed of salad, but he's more like its Colonel Tom Parker.

of hazelnuts and newly mowed grass. In a farmer's hands, it can turn flabby and insipid. How do you shape so delicate a thing for the blunt tastes of the American consumer? How do you turn it into a uniform and predictable product, one that lends itself to mechanized harvesting and washing, can last for weeks without wilting, and yields enough to justify all the money that's been poured into it? How do you make a widget out of a weed?

"A lot of this isn't about winning. It's about not losing," Koons told me one morning, as he surveyed a field of mâche that was ready for harvest. "Because, in agriculture, not losing is really pretty good." The field lay near the center of the Salinas Valley, two hours south of San Francisco. To the east, the Gabilan Mountains, patched with scrub oak and bluegrass and crimson madrone, rose toward the distant Diablo Range. Across the valley, beyond a hazy line of willows that marked the windings of the Salinas River, the ochre hills of the Santa Lucias hunkered in the sun. It was past eleven, so the fog that blankets the valley every morning had burned off. Soon, the fields would heat up, drawing cool air down the valley from the Pacific Ocean, seventeen miles away. Most days, the temperature never rises above seventy.

The valley's abundant sun and cool air, loamy soil, and vast underground aquifer have turned it into America's Salad Bowl: ninety per cent of our salad greens—around four billion pounds a year—are grown here. The valley has two hundred or so lettuce farmers, who sell their harvest to about twenty shipping companies. The two largest shippers, Dole and Fresh Express, account for almost eighty per cent of the bagged-salad business. They own their own farms in addition to buying from local growers, and they have driven prices low enough to force most small operators out of business.

Epic Roots is one of the smallest farms around. Its two hundred acres of mâche are a tiny fraction of the valley's hundred and forty thousand acres of salad greens. Still, like the small organic farms that first grew mesclun more than twenty years ago, the company has cornered its market: most of the valley's industrial farms either haven't heard of mâche or find it too finicky to grow. To temper the California sun and keep out insects like the leaf miner, Koons and his two main growers, David Gill and Mike Hitchcock, have to keep their mâche under blue-green row covers, which look like miniature tents at an army base. Even then, the plant germinates so slowly and grows so low to the ground that it is easily overwhelmed by weeds. "I mean, show me the mâche over there," Koons said, pointing to a shaggy patch in the next row. "If just one weed germinates, that's what you get."

On an organic farm, growers can gradually clear the soil by letting the weeds sprout up, then plowing them under before they go to seed. But it's a slow, expensive process. In a year or two, when the mâche market has been established and the plant's idiosyncrasies are better understood, farming it organically should be cost-effective. For now, though, the growers still use chemical herbicides. "I'm an organic guy to the core," Koons said. "But, growing these babies, it's hard to stay true to it all." Even when the mâche grows clear and a heat wave doesn't kill it, he added, the crop doesn't always survive the harvest.

Koons plucked a piece of mâche from the ground and shook off the soil, then turned it over to show me its long, nubbly root. Between the top of the root and the hub of the rosette lay a pale-green stem less than a quarter of an inch long. To harvest mâche mechanically—which Koons must do in order to turn a profit—a machine has to cut the plant within this tiny strike zone, which lies entirely underground. And it has to do so with absolute consistency. "Other plants give you a lot more leeway," Koons said. "If you're growing a five-inch baby lettuce, you can cut it anywhere. But with mâche you'll either end up with too much root or you'll just have a bunch of leaves."

Epic Roots has harvesting machines that can manage the trick, skimming a long, thin blade just beneath the surface, but only if the fields are laid out with mathematical precision—"and nature abhors precision," Koons said. The mâche beds have to be levelled by machinery guided by G.P.S. and lasers. The seeds are pneumatically injected at three-inch intervals. The harvesters are imported from France, where mâche is grown mainly in the Loire Valley, but nearly every component has to be modified to suit the soil and scale of local farming. "It's a brave new world over here," Koons said. "The machines are bigger, we drive 'em faster, and we drive 'em longer. It's just a different beast."

BRING IN THE GODS

Bring in the gods, I say, and he goes out. When he comes
back and I know they are with him, I say, Put tables in front
of them so they may be seated, and food upon the tables
so they may eat. When they have eaten, I ask which of them
will question me. Let him hold up his hand, I say.
The one on the left raises his hand and I tell him to ask.
Where are you now, he says. I stand on top of myself, I hear
myself answer. I stand on myself like a hilltop and my life
is spread before me. Does it surprise you, he asks. I explain
that in our youth and for a long time after our youth we cannot
see our lives. Because we are inside of that. Because we can
see no shape to it, since we have nothing to compare it to.
We have not seen it grow and change because we are too close.
We don't know the names of things that would bind them to us,
so we cannot feed on them. One near the middle asks why not.
Because we don't have the knack for eating what we are living.
Why is that? she asks. Because we are too much in a hurry.
Where are you now? the one on the left says. With the ghosts.
I am with Gianna those two years in Perugia. Meeting secretly

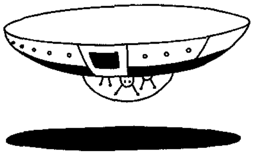
in the thirteenth-century alleys of stone. Walking in the fields
through the spring light, she well dressed and walking in heels
over the plowed land. We are just outside the city walls
hidden under the thorny blackberry bushes and her breasts naked.
I am with her those many twilights in the olive orchards,
holding the heart of her as she whimpers. Now where are you?
he says. I am with Linda those years and years. In American
cities, in Copenhagen, on Greek islands season after season.
Lindos and Monolithos and the other places. I am with Michiko
for eleven years, East and West, holding her clear in my mind
the way a native can hold all of his village at one moment.
Where are you now? he says. I am standing on myself the way
a bird sits in her nest, with the babies half asleep underneath
and the world all leaves and morning air. What do you want?
a blonde one asks. To keep what I already have, I say. You ask
too much, he says sternly. Then you are at peace, she says.
I am not at peace, I tell her. I want to fail. I am hungry
for what I am becoming. What will you do? she asks. I will
continue north, carrying the past in my arms, flying into winter.

—*Jack Gilbert*

Earlier that week, the cutting head of a harvester had been broken and had to be repaired, at a cost of twenty-five thousand dollars. In the meantime, the grower had sent one of his crews of Oaxacan migrants, most of whom make about seven dollars an hour, to handpick the crop. Koons watched them shuffle down the rows of plants, bundled in mud-stained sweatsuits and bandannas, working their curved little knives in the soil. "There was a time in my life when I was cockier, when I deluded myself into thinking I knew what I was doing," he said. "That has definitely changed."

When Koons arrived at Chez Panisse, in 1978, Alice Waters, like many American chefs, still had to forage for much of what she served. Then as now, the restaurant offered only a single, prix-fixe dinner menu, but it changed every day and many ingredients couldn't be found in stores. "For me, those were the best years," Jean-Pierre Moullé, the restaurant's soft-spoken senior chef, told me. "We didn't have the network we have now, but people would come to the back door with some berries they'd collected, or some fish they'd caught." Sometimes neighbors brought vegetables from their gardens and exchanged them for meals, or Moullé collected chanterelles in the Berkeley hills. Waters had designated Koons the garde-manger, or pantry manager, so if any ingredient was still lacking he would wake up before dawn and start driving. He might head up to Petaluma for wild strawberries or down to the Sacramento River delta for crayfish. "He was a kid who wanted to touch everything," Moullé said.

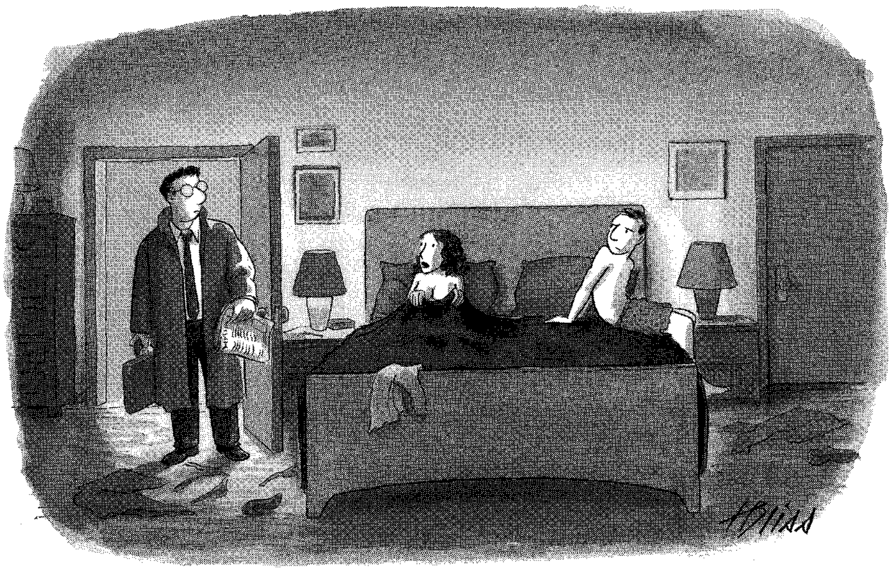
Koons and Moullé soon became friends and started a garden together for the restaurant, on terraced plots in a local doctor's back yard. But Koons's real culinary education came later, when he and Waters began dating. She wasn't yet the "doyenne of Western cuisine," he says, but she was already well connected in the food world. When they vacationed together in France, Italy, New York, and London, the days would spool by like endless tasting menus. "If we were in some tiny little market in the South of France, she'd meet Lulu Peyraud, who is a central figure in French cooking, and we'd be invited for dinner at her vineyard." In Mexico, they dined with Diana Kennedy, and in Portland with James Beard; in Paris they ate at L'Ami Louis and in Venice at the Gritti Palace. "I can't remember all the places, but I can remember all the meals," Koons says.



Friends say that the relationship was always a fractious one, and not just because of the differences in Waters's and Koons's ages and job titles. "I think he was so lovely she didn't take him seriously," one mutual acquaintance told me. "He didn't have sufficient gravitas for her." Koons credits Waters with taking the edge off his youthful arrogance—he fancied himself a food critic at first, after his gourmet upbringing—but there was also "a little fear there," he says. "You don't go up against the God Mother." After they broke up, in the early eighties, he left the restaurant. As Moullé, who has himself been fired once or twice from Chez Panisse, put it, "When things are going wrong with Alice, she has a tendency to say, 'Just go.' "

Koons drifted for a while after that, from cooking to farming and back again. He worked for chefs in Paris and New York, and became a consultant for organic farms in the Bay Area. Then, in 1986, he was hired by a subsidiary of Dalgety, a British agricultural-supply firm, to launch a fresh-herb operation in the Salinas Valley. "It was my first experience of corporate agriculture," he says. "They were a fifteen-billion-dollar company, and they put a lot of money into this line. We had sample packs and herb bags, and we developed the technology to de-stem and chop up the herbs." Unlike Koons, however, Dalgety had little intrinsic interest in being a pioneer. It had projected nine million dollars in gross revenues within the first year. When herb sales fell far short of that mark, the company shut the operation down.

"I was incredulous," Koons says, but he was also impressed. The people at Dalgety had taken an obscure crop and reinvented it for the mainstream. They had shown him how to reach beyond the benevolent food snobs of Berkeley—to spread the bounty of Chez Panisse to the rest of the country. They had simply picked the wrong crop: fresh herbs, as ubiquitous as they've since become, are still only a hundred-million-dollar business. "They thought these little greens were where it's at," Koons says. "*Salad* was



"I know what you're thinking, but let me offer a competing narrative."

• •

"where it was at." A few weeks after the herb business went bust, he borrowed a hundred thousand dollars from his girlfriend's mother, who had founded a lucrative stock-photography agency in New York. Then he leased forty acres of an old ranch inside the Salinas city limits and founded TKO: Todd Koons Organic.

Like any grower of salad greens, Koons began with a basic problem: his plants weren't designed to go anywhere. Most fruits and vegetables are naturally prepackaged for transport. Their moisture is sealed within a peel or a pod, their flesh bound together and shielded from bacteria and the elements. Lettuce is much more vulnerable. When cut, it reacts a lot like a person who has been badly wounded: it starts to respire heavily, using the extra oxygen to speed up its metabolism and rev up its immune system. A plant that's still rooted can prevent infection this way and then grow new tissue. Once harvested, it consumes itself in the effort. More and more of its cellulose breaks down, releasing energy and producing water. The more water the lettuce loses, the more it wilts.

Cold can delay the process considerably: for every ten-degree drop, the chemical reactions in a leaf are cut in half. But salad greens can't be frozen like other vegetables, or their cells will be ruptured by ice crystals. A refrigerator can keep them crisp for a week or so, but that isn't nearly long enough for most farmers. Though ninety per cent of American lettuce is grown in the West, much of it is eaten in the East. If cut lettuce were put in an ordinary refrigerated truck, it would be half-dead by the time it got from California to New York. That is why Americans spent a century eating iceberg: it's a lettuce with so much water and such strong cell walls that it can last for two or three weeks without wilting. It's a lettuce built for the long haul.

In the early nineteen-sixties, scientists at the Whirlpool Corporation put some iceberg leaves under a glass jar, pumped out all the air, and flooded the jar with carbon dioxide and oxygen. Those were exuberant days for food technologists. Elsewhere in the lab, researchers were zapping vegetables with radiation and inventing squeeze dispensers for astronauts. The iceberg team reasoned that if lettuce were deprived of oxygen to fuel its breakdown it would stay crisp much longer. They were right, but only within limits. If the lettuce received too little oxygen, its anaerobic metabolism kicked in and, like the yeasts in beer, began to yield ethanol and other potent by-products. The lettuce, in other words, began to ferment. The trick was to take some but not all of the oxygen out of the atmosphere: you had to keep the lettuce barely breathing.

Total Environment Control, as this process was then called, nearly doubled the shelf life of lettuce, turning it into an international commodity. By the early seventies, the U.S. Army was sending heads of iceberg to Vietnam. But shredded lettuce still couldn't be shipped in bulk—it wilted too quickly once it left the truck's controlled atmosphere—and that was where the real money was. Lettuce farmers were throwing out half their crops, because the heads were slightly imperfect. If those heads could be shredded and sold, the industry could more than double its profits.

In 1966, Whirlpool joined with a California grower (now called Fresh Express) to create the first bagged salad: a mixture of iceberg, endive, and cabbage sealed in plastic and pumped full of carbon dioxide, nitrogen, and oxygen. "It crashed and burned," Jim Lugg, the president of Transfresh, a sister company that did the research and development for Fresh Express, told me. The atmosphere inside the bags was much harder to control than that inside a truck. If the bag was airtight, the lettuce used up any oxygen and began to ferment. If it leaked, the lettuce respired too much and began to turn pink and wilt. The smallest pieces deteriorated fastest, leaving the salad speckled with blackened slime. "So we went back to the drawing board," Lugg said.

It took Fresh Express until 1989—more than twenty years and another disastrous product rollout later—to "crack the code," as Lugg put it, and mass-produce the first retail bagged salads. Salad spinners were perfected, shredding knives sharpened, battalions of chemists subcontracted to create the perfect polymers. Today's bags are a triumph of practical ingenuity. Their plastic is made up of five to ten layers, each with a different function. Some are designed to make the package shiny or crinkly, others to carry print well. Together, they have to be just permeable enough to keep the bag's artificial atmosphere in balance—the wrong ink alone can suffocate a salad. As the lettuce sits on the shelf, the gases in the bag are constantly consumed, released, and replaced. Oxygen, nitrogen, and carbon-dioxide molecules bond with the polymers on one side of the plastic and are released on the other, diffusing from high concentrations to low. Every type of salad requires a different type of bag, tailored to its respiration rate by gas chromatography and computer analysis. Every bag is a miniature biosphere.

Thanks to the new technology, lettuce could now, theoretically, be kept crisp for up to thirty-five days—five times longer than was possible with refrigeration alone. But to start a salad craze, Koons knew, you needed something better than iceberg. Word of mesclun had spread across the country by then, but the supply was limited. At first, chefs like Waters grew the greens themselves, from seed bought in France and smuggled through customs by the suitcase-full. Then a handful of organic truck farmers—Warren Weber in Marin County, Morse Pitts in the Hudson Valley—began selling them to restaurants and natural-food stores, and at farmers' markets. Demand was so high that plants like radicchio, arugula, mizuna, and lolla rossa helped stores turn huge profits. To industrial growers, though, organic growers were just hippies exploiting a fad: weed farmers, they called them.

"The thing about organics back then was that we had to invent everything," Koons told me. Mesclun, unlike mâche, had never been farmed industrially overseas. In Provence, gardeners simply blended seeds together and scattered them by the handful. Koons tried to emulate them at first, but the plants matured at different rates, so when some were ready to harvest others were overgrown or undergrown. He tried using spinach harvesters—colossal machines with sicklelike blades and powerful vacuums to suck in the leaves—but they chewed up the crops and spat out little pieces that quickly spoiled. The biggest challenge, though, was washing and drying. At Chez Panisse, Waters would gently dip each leaf in a cold-water bath, then set the leaves to dry on cloth towels, a single layer at a time. Koons didn't have time for that.

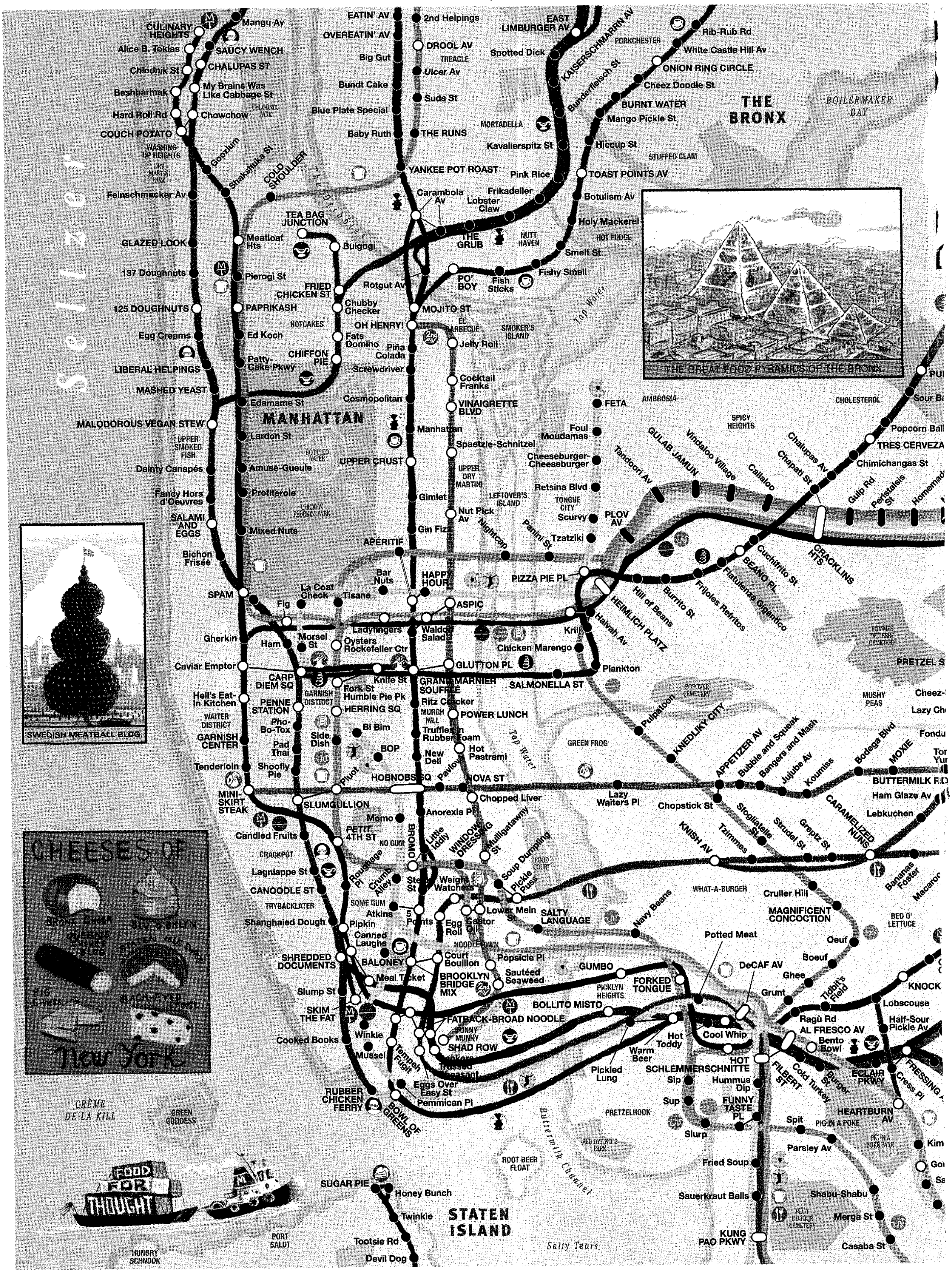
"I remember going to San Jose to see the first washing system we had custom-built," Koons told me. "It was designed by an engineer named Schnake, who came to me from one of the companies I was buying equipment from. It looked like something out of Willy Wonka. It had a tank forty feet long, with these undulating plastic walls, like a swimming pool in Las Vegas, and there were all these cones along the sides to do the gentle washing. It had cables and pulleys, and a bubble system, and this giant orange-and-white agitator that would come down." Koons had spent six hundred thousand dollars on the machine, but when Schnake threw in some salad for a test run half the leaves shot right through the tank without getting clean. The other half hit the cones and went around and around, slowly getting beaten to a pulp. "It was like a giant green smoothie machine," Koons said. "And that was just the first stage. There was a big tank with paddles after that. I was, like, 'Schnake, you're an *engineer*. My five-year-old daughter could have designed something better than this.' I wanted to kick him."

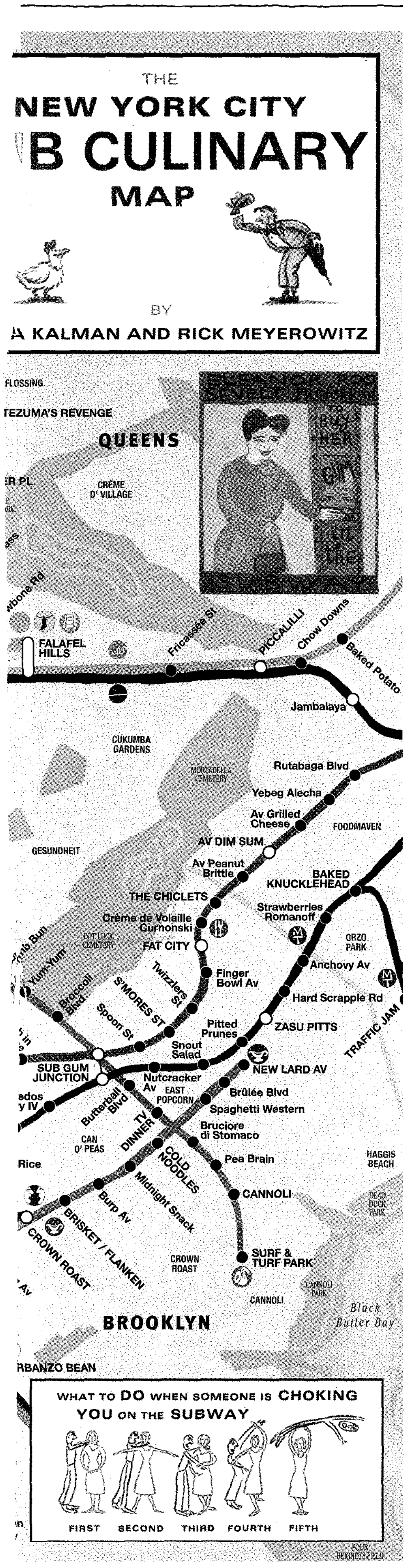
Every lettuce grower in the valley has a boneyard somewhere: a warehouse full of monstrous old machines—gut-sprung shredders, sabre-toothed tillers, and mammoth transplanters—long since replaced by sleeker beasts. Koons knows one grower who used Jacuzzis to wash his greens, and another who used clothes dryers to spin them. Before there were salad baggers, people experimented with Teflon-coated machines designed to package cigarettes. "They were a quarter million a pop," Koons recalls. "So we had a guy build us one for a hundred thousand instead. It was sixteen feet tall and looked like a giant praying mantis. The salad would go to the top of this thing and then these buckets would clang open and let it drop into the bags. *Ka-chang! Ka-chang!*"

Koons never quite perfected his machines. Mesclun was selling for fourteen dollars a pound, so he could afford to lose some of his crop to inefficiency. By 1993, TKO was farming ten thousand acres a year and shipping bagged mesclun nationwide. But in agriculture, Koons likes to say, nature always bats last. In January of 1995, ten inches of rain fell, swelling the Salinas River to capacity. When storms dumped another ten inches in March, the river washed over its banks. Within days, the flood had reached once-in-a-century levels and all of TKO's farms were underwater. "It was one of the fastest bankruptcies in history," Koons says. The hardest blow came later, though, when he ran into Waters at a conference on sustainable agriculture. "I can almost see what she was wearing," he says. "She was about to address the crowd at dinner, and we were talking off to the side. She shook her finger at me and said, 'You grew too large.' "

The real cause of TKO's downfall wasn't ambition; it was inexperience. Veteran salad farmers know better than to have all their fields in a floodplain and all their money in the same crop. Koons proved that there was a huge market for organic salad and mesclun, but his farming was never efficient enough to truly

FINNEGAN'S
WILL MOTHER WITH FOOD
Shanahan


Seltzer
CULINARY HEIGHTS
Mangu Av
Alice B. Toklas
SAUCY WENCH
Chlodnik St
CHALUPAS ST
Beshbarmak
My Brains Was Like Cabbage St
Hard Roll Rd
Chowchow
CHLODNIK PARK
COUCH POTATO
WASHING UP HEIGHTS
DRY MARTINI PARK
Goozlum
Shakshuka St
COLD SHOULDER
The Dribbles
Feinschmecker Av
EATIN' AV
2nd Helpings
OVEREATIN' AV
Big Gut
DROOL AV
TREACLE
Ulcer Av
Bundt Cake
Suds St
Blue Plate Special
Baby Ruth
THE RUNS
YANKEE POT ROAST
EAST LIMBURGER AV
KAISERSCHMARRN AV
PORKCHESTER
Rib-Rub Rd
White Castle Hill Av
Spotted Dick
Bunderfleisch St
ONION RING CIRCLE
Cheez Doodle St
BURNT WATER
Mango Pickle St
THE BRONX
BOILERMAKER BAY
MORTADELLA
Kavalierspitz St
Hiccup St
STUFFED CLAM
Pink Rice
TOAST POINTS AV
Carambola Av
Frikadeller
Lobster Claw
Botulism Av
TEA BAG JUNCTION
GLAZED LOOK
Meatloaf Hts
Bulgogi
THE GRUB
NUTT HAVEN
Holy Mackerel
HOT FUDGE
Smelt St
137 Doughnuts
Pierogi St
FRIED CHICKEN ST
Rotgut Av
PO' BOY
Fish Sticks
Fishy Smell
Top Water
125 DOUGHNUTS
PAPRIKASH
Chubby Checker
MOJITO ST
HOTCAKES
OH HENRY!
EL BARBECUE
SMOKER'S ISLAND
Egg Creams
Ed Koch
Fats Domino
Piña Colada
Jelly Roll
CHIFFON PIE
LIBERAL HELPINGS
Patty-Cake Pkwy
Screwdriver
Cocktail Franks
MASHED YEAST
Edamame St
Cosmopolitan
VINAIGRETTE BLVD
FETA
AMBROSIA
CHOLESTEROL
MANHATTAN
MALODOROUS VEGAN STEW
Manhattan
Foul Moudamas
SPICY HEIGHTS
Popcorn Ball
Sour Ba
PUI
UPPER SMOKED FISH
Lardon St
BOTTLED WATER
Spaetzle-Schnitzel
TRES CERVEZA
UPPER CRUST
Cheeseburger-Cheeseburger
Tandoori Av
GULAB JAMUN
Vindaloo Village
Calaloo
Chapati St
Chalupas Av
Chimichangas St
Dainty Canapés
Amuse-Gueule
UPPER DRY MARTINI
Retsina Blvd
Gulp Rd
Peristalsis St
Homemad
Fancy Hors d'Oeuvres
Profiterole
Gimlet
LEFTOVER'S ISLAND
TONGUE CITY
CHICKEN PLUCKIN' PARK
Nut Pick Av
Scurvy
PLOV AV
SALAMI AND EGGS
Mixed Nuts
Gin Fizz
Nightcap
Panini St
Tzatziki
CRACKLINS HTS
Bichon Frisée
APÉRITIF
Cuchifrito St
BEANO PL
Bar Nuts
HAPPY HOUR
PIZZA PIE PL
Burrito St
Flatulenza Gigantico
Hill of Beans
Frijoles Refritos
SPAM
La Coat Check
Tisane
ASPIC
Fig
HEIMLICH PLATZ
Halvah Av
Gherkin
Ham
Morsel St
Ladyfingers
Waldorf Salad
Krill
POMMES DE TERRE CEMETERY
Oysters Rockefeller Ctr
Chicken Marengo
Caviar Emptor
GLUTTON PL
Plankton
PRETZEL S
CARP DIEM SQ
Knife St
GRAND MARNIER SOUFFLÉ
SALMONELLA ST
Hell's Eat-In Kitchen
GARNISH DISTRICT
Fork St
Humble Pie Pk
POPOVER CEMETERY
MUSHY PEAS
Cheez-
PENNE STATION
HERRING SQ
Ritz Cracker
Pulpatoon
Lazy Ch
WAITER DISTRICT
Pho-Bo-Tox
MURGH HILL
POWER LUNCH
KNEDLIKY CITY
GARNISH CENTER
Side Dish
Bi Bim
Truffles in Rubber Foam
Top Water
GREEN FROG
APPETIZER AV
Bubble and Squeak
Bangers and Mash
Bodega Blvd
Fondu
Pad Thai
BOP
New Deli
Hot Pastrami
Jujube Av
Koumiss
MOXIE
Tor Yu
Tenderloin
Shoofly Pie
Pluot
HOBNOBS SQ
Pavlova
NOVA ST
BUTTERMILK RD
MINI-SKIRT STEAK
SLUMGULLION
Chopped Liver
Lazy Waiters Pl
Chopstick St
Sfogliatelle St
Strudel St
Gretzel St
CARAMELIZED NUNS
Ham Glaze Av
Lebkuchen
Momo
Anorexia Pl
BROMO
Little Italy
WINDOW DRESSING
Mulligatawny St
KNISH AV
Tzimmes
Candied Fruits
PETIT 4TH ST
NO GUM
CRACKPOT
Soup Dumpling
FOOD COURT
Lagniappe St
Roughage Pl
Crumb Alley
Stew St
Weight Watchers
Pickle Puss
Bananas Foster
Macaro
CANOODLE ST
TRYBACKLATER
SOME GUM
WHAT-A-BURGER
Cruller Hill
Atkins
5 Points
Lower Mein St
SALTY LANGUAGE
Navy Beans
MAGNIFICENT CONCOCTION
BED O' LETTUCE
Shanghaied Dough
Pipkin
Egg Roll
Castor Oil
Potted Meat
Canned Laughs
NOODLETOWN
Oeuf
SHREDDED DOCUMENTS
BALONEY
Court Bouillon
Popsicle Pl
GUMBO
Boeuf
DeCAF AV
Ghee
Meal Ticket
BROOKLYN BRIDGE MIX
Sautéed Seaweed
FORKED TONGUE
PICKLYN HEIGHTS
Tidbit's Field
KNOCK
Slump St
Grunt
SKIM THE FAT
BOLLITO MISTO
Lobscouse
FATBACK-BROAD NOODLE
Ragù Rd
AL FRESCO AV
Half-Sour Pickle Av
FUNNY MUNNY
Cooked Books
Winkle
SHAD ROW
Hot Toddy
Cool Whip
Bento Bowl
Yankers
Mussel
Tempus Fugit
Trussed Pheasant
Warm Beer
HOT SCHLEMMERSCHNITTE
Cold Turkey
Burger St
ECLAIR PKWY
FRESSING A
Cress Pl
Pickled Lung
FILBERT ST
Eggs Over Easy St
Sip
Hummus Dip
RUBBER CHICKEN FERRY
BOWL OF GREENS
Pemmican Pl
Sup
PRETZELHOOK
FUNNY TASTE PL
HEARTBURN AV
CRÈME DE LA KILL
GREEN GODDESS
Buttermilk Channel
Spit
PIG IN A POKE
PIG IN A POKE PARK
Slurp
Parsley Av
Kim
RED DYE NO. 2 PARK
Go
ROOT BEER FLOAT
Fried Soup
Sa
FOOD FOR THOUGHT
SUGAR PIE
Honey Bunch
Sauerkraut Balls
Shabu-Shabu
Twinkie
STATEN ISLAND
PLAT DU JOUR CEMETERY
Merga St
PORT SALUT
Tootsie Rd
Salty Tears
KUNG PAO PKWY
Casaba St
HUNGRY SCHNOOK
Devil Dog
THE GREAT FOOD PYRAMIDS OF THE BRONX
SWEDISH MEATBALL BLDG.
CHEESES OF New York
BRONX CHEESE
BLV'D B'KLYN
QUEENS CHEDDAR BLDG
STATEN ISLE SWISS
BIG CHEESE
BLACK-EYED CHEESE


THE
NEW YORK CITY
B CULINARY
MAP
BY
A KALMAN AND RICK MEYEROWITZ
FLOSSING
TEZUMA'S REVENGE
QUEENS
CRÈME D' VILLAGE
FALAFEL HILLS
Fricassée St
PICCALILLI
Chow Downs
Baked Potato
Jambalaya
CUKUMBA GARDENS
MORTADELLA CEMETERY
Rutabaga Blvd
Yebeg Alecha
Av Grilled Cheese
FOODMAVEN
AV DIM SUM
GESUNDHEIT
Av Peanut Brittle
BAKED KNUCKLEHEAD
THE CHICLETS
Strawberries Romanoff
Crème de Volaille Curnonski
POT LUCK CEMETERY
FAT CITY
ORZO PARK
Anchovy Av
Finger Bowl Av
Twizzlers St
Yum-Yum
Broccoli Blvd
S'MORES ST
Spoon St
Hard Scrapple Rd
Pitted Prunes
ZASU PITTS
TRAFFIC JAM
Snout Salad
SUB GUM JUNCTION
NEW LARD AV
Nutcracker Av
EAST POPCORN
Brûlée Blvd
Butterball Blvd
Spaghetti Western
TV DINNER
Bruciore di Stomaco
CAN O' PEAS
COLD NOODLES
Pea Brain
HAGGIS BEACH
Rice
Midnight Snack
CANNOLI
DEAD DUCK PARK
Burp Av
BRISKET / FLANKEN
CROWN ROAST
CROWN ROAST
SURF & TURF PARK
CANNOLI
CANNOLI PARK
Black Butter Bay
BROOKLYN
RBANZO BEAN
WHAT TO DO WHEN SOMEONE IS CHOKING YOU ON THE SUBWAY
FIRST
SECOND
THIRD
FOURTH
FIFTH
FOUR BERNINIS FIELD

exploit that market—and he liked it that way. He didn't want to undercut the small organic farms that had mesclun to themselves when he started. He just wanted to sell the same product at the same price to a broader audience. In the end, though, he helped put them all out of business. "I was the pioneer, the wedge," he says. "I took every arrow in my back and in my ass, then I paved the way for the market to get there."

After TKO went under, a small organic grower called Earthbound Farm bought most of its assets. Earthbound then went on to become a partner with a couple of the largest conventional growers in the valley, Mission Ranches and Tanimura & Antle. Together, they now sell almost eighty per cent of the country's organic greens—about a billion servings a year. Earthbound's farms are spread across six states, parcelled among microclimates where fewer insects will find them. Its efficiencies are such that the price of mesclun has fallen to five dollars a pound. "For a long time, all the guys at universities and the organic farmers said that you just can't do it well on a large scale," Warren Weber, Chez Panisse's first supplier, told me. "But when the commercial guys finally swooped in it seemed like they learned it in seconds."

One morning near San Juan Bautista, forty-five minutes north of Koons's mâche farm, I watched one of Earthbound's harvesters rip through a field of green oak-leaf lettuce. The machine had half a dozen ungainly appendages, like some gizmo fresh from an inventor's basement, but it worked flawlessly. As it moved down the row, it first pushed a rakelike device known as a "tickler" through the crop, shooing away rodents and other undesirables. Then it sliced the plants with a band-saw blade, half an inch from the ground. The cut leaves fell onto the first of a series of conveyor belts. One had a vibrating grid that shook out any small pieces. Other belts were separated by "air jumps," with fans blowing up through them. Rocks, insects, and other heavy objects fell through the gaps, while the leaves wafted gently up to the next belt. At the top of the incline, the greens were sprinkled with water and gently dropped into twenty-pound bins, a line of which snaked down a conveyor belt of their own.

At full speed, the machine can harvest forty thousand pounds of greens a day. And Earthbound, I was told, always runs at full speed. From the moment the crop is harvested until bags of salad reach grocery stores, three to six days later, the company is in a dead sprint to preserve shelf life. The greens are carried straight from the harvester to a refrigerated truck in the field. From there, they go to a nearby factory, equipped with processing machines that are like those at TKO but engineered to the tightest tolerances. The salad washers look like rides at a water park, with paddle wheels that submerge the leaves in a lightly chlorinated stream and bubbling agitators that toss them clean. The spinners are perfectly calibrated to keep from crushing the lettuce against their sides. The form fillers weigh the salad in precise increments, drop it into Ziploc bags fused together on the spot, then puff the bags with the proper gases before completely sealing them. At every stage of the process—from truck to factory to refrigerated shelf in the supermarket—the salad is kept between thirty-four and thirty-six degrees Fahrenheit. The "cold chain," as salad producers call it, is never broken.

Organic growers still produce only seven per cent of the bagged salad sold in this country, but their operations are some of the most efficient and competitive in the industry. That's one reason Koons focussed on mâche: when he founded Epic Roots, in 1998—after working as a consultant for another organic grower—Earthbound wasn't growing it yet. He spent five years testing growing techniques and mâche varieties (there are more than two hundred). Then he went looking for some help.

David Gill and Mike Hitchcock, Koons's two principal partners, are among the most experienced growers in the valley: together, they farm fourteen thousand acres of other salads and vegetables in addition to mâche. By the time Koons approached them, they'd seen arugula take off, in the late nineteen-nineties, and they were willing to take a chance on the next great green. "We thought we'd all make millions of dollars," Gill told me. "We didn't anticipate how tough it would be to grow." Still, the learning curve has been no steeper than it was for mesclun. This past spring, the company had its first two profitable months. With luck, Gill says, they may have a good season or two ahead of them, before Earthbound or some other industrial grower steps in and takes over.

The mâche grown by Epic Roots is processed in a plant similar to Earthbound's, though the leaves are so delicate that they require particularly gentle washing. A whole year's harvest—around three-quarters of a million pounds—could be bagged in two days by Earthbound. But demand is rising steadily. When Epic Roots shipped its first mâche, two years ago, fewer than a hundred stores carried it. Within a year, the number had grown to a thousand. This year, nearly two thousand stores carry the company's mâche, including the Whole Foods and Trader Joe's chains, and Epic Roots has been endorsed by top chefs like Daniel Boulud. In the spring, after reviewing the company's microbial and shelf-life studies, Burger King approved mâche for inclusion in its mixed salads. “It's not like they'll start saying, ‘Now with *mâche!*’ ” Koons acknowledges. “They don't even know how to pronounce it yet. But it does give me hope.”

The salad industry is an American success story of the old-fashioned kind: innovators make good; business bears fruit. Its growth seems hard to begrudge. All the technology brought to bear on greens, from polymers and gases to cold chains and harvesters, is in the service of a more natural product. Fifty years ago, vegetables were overcooked and sealed in cans; twenty years ago they were frozen in cartons; today they're packaged fresh in clear plastic bags. While most lettuce is still grown with chemical herbicides and pesticides, organic farms like Earthbound's are as healthy and beautiful as they are mechanically sophisticated. Even an old organic warrior like Warren Weber admits that their produce, when picked fresh, can taste as good as anything he grows. Isn't that good enough?

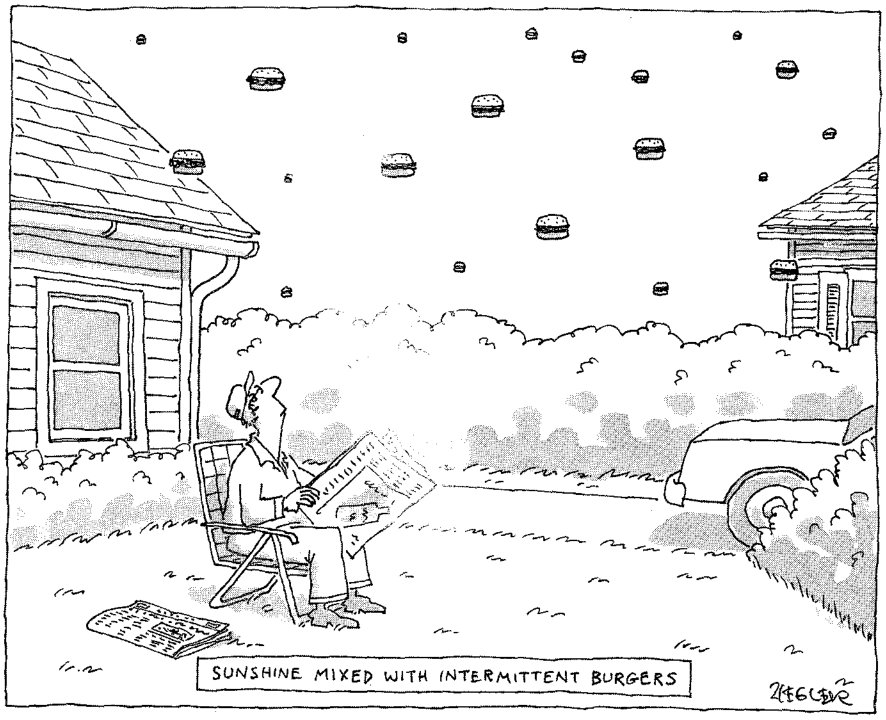
No, as a matter of fact, it's not, Alice Waters told me. “When I think what that little mesclun mix has turned into, it just makes me sad,” she said. “To think that someone can put that name on a bag of salad from God knows where . . . It's pretty alarming. Pret-ty alarming. And I feel terribly responsible for that.” It was late afternoon at Chez Panisse, and a soft, refracted light fell on the nearly empty dining room. Beneath the mitred redwood beams and copper sconces, waiters moved about noiselessly, setting the tables for dinner. Waters, who turned sixty in April, was wearing a plain but elegantly cut black blouse and skirt, striped gray stockings, and pointy black boots. She has a small, fine-boned face, cropped auburn hair streaked with white, and a fluty voice that rises and falls with high, sighing enthusiasms. “I'm enchanted by salad,” she said. “I could wash it all day.” But although she's grateful for all the greens now available, changing American tastes was never more than part of her purpose. It was an opening gambit at best.

“This is not like packing boxes of paper towels,” she said. “This is nourishment. You have to always know that you're feeding somebody. And you have to understand the ecological consequences.” Eight years ago, Waters created the Chez Panisse Foundation, in order to promote sustainable agriculture, but industrial organic farms meet only some of her criteria. They may not use herbicides, pesticides, or chemical fertilizers, but they perpetuate all the other ills of conventional farming. Bagged salads, and the boxed salads that have become increasingly popular, are just another new source of packaging and waste. Their longer shelf life means only that trucks can carry them even farther away, burning fossil fuels and releasing greenhouse gases. True organic food ought to reconnect people to the land, to make farming a local activity again. Industrial organic farms do the opposite. They force small farmers out of business, marginalize farmers' markets, and make packaged food so convenient that consumers forget where it comes from. “I know it's important that people in St. Louis, Missouri, get some salad,” Waters said. “But I'd rather send them the seed and get them to plant it than ship it across the country.”

Waters's idea of a model farmer is Bob Cannard, who supplies much of the produce for Chez Panisse. Cannard is a burly fifty-two-year-old with the unruly silver mane and penetrating eyes of a nineteenth-century abolitionist. His twenty-five-acre farm lies in the foothills of the Sonoma Mountains, a rugged, verdant landscape hummocked by old lava flows and gnarled with vineyards. He grows dozens of different kinds of plants, including olives and grapes, avocados and limes, eight kinds of onions, and fifty kinds of tomatoes. As a former agriculture instructor, he can wax arcanely eloquent about their biochemistry—their oxidates, exudates, and silicates, or the few parts of gold per million in carrot leaves. Mostly, though, he's concerned for their souls.

“There is damn little contentment in humanity today, and most of that is because our food has no contentment itself,” Cannard told me. A plant raised in a tedious monoculture and bloated on an unvarying, industrial diet can't help but pass its listlessness on to us: most produce has less than fifteen per cent of the minerals it had a century ago. “I want my plants to have a life of choice, with all the nutrients they could possibly desire,” he said. “I want them to have their happiness, to build their etheric sweetness. I want people to eat that food and have vegetable dreams.”

Cannard not only feeds his crops with compost; he brews hundred-gallon vats of nutrient “teas” and sends them coursing through his irrigation system. He throws in handfuls of crushed oyster shells, sea salt, and volcanic rock, cartons of eggs and milk, and jugs of molasses. Some days, he'll make a lavender or rosemary tea, to revive his plants with “energetic aromas.” Other days, he'll add some worm castings or swallow droppings, from birds that nest under the eaves of his house. The bacteria, he says, help his crops absorb nutrients from the soil. After twenty-eight years of farming, Cannard can tell at a glance what his crops require. “A plant doesn't wear makeup or dark glasses or anything,” he says. “It will just sit there in its nakedness and show you how it's feeling through its color, its posture, its textures,


SUNSHINE MIXED WITH INTERMITTENT BURGERS

its anchorage." His farm is a kind of spiritual retreat for stressed-out crops. Even the wind and the wild birds, he says, sing to his vegetables.

Whether the vegetables hear them is matter for debate. The quality of Cannard's produce is not. When Waters was sampling the dishes for that night's menu at Chez Panisse, she let me try one of her famous mesclun salads. It was a feathery mixture of frisée, curly endive, arugula, and half a dozen other plants from Cannard's farm, and I could almost taste the lavender and rosemary in it. The essence of a great salad, I realized, is the very ephemerality that industrial growers have spent so long combatting—the burst of stored energy in its leaves, the taste of volatile compounds reacting and releasing their flavors. "It's about something that has life in it," Waters said.

It may be true that an industrially grown plant can taste as good as anything from a small farm. But a bagged salad is a creature of compromise, designed as much for color and longevity as for flavor. It's put together by a team of "sensory experts" and engineers at a salad company, and the latter get final say. "Quite often, the sensory folks will tell us, 'Oh, we really like this stuff,' " Jim Lugg, of Transfresh, told me. "But the technologists trying to get the right film and respiration—they can't come together." If spinach and romaine can't cohabitate in a bag, one of them must go.

Of course, growing greens Cannard's way can be expensive, and it's a hell of a lot easier in California than it is in North Dakota. But Waters believes that those are sacrifices we should be willing to make. She has had fabulous salad from Maine in the dead of winter, she told me, grown organically in greenhouses. Its extra price was only proper for something that is essential to our lives. "We need to learn to pay more for our produce, so that farmers can continue to do their beautiful work," she said. Or, as Cannard put it, there isn't a state in the Union that shouldn't be growing its own salad.

That evening, Waters had a small table set for me in the kitchen, so that I could watch her chefs at work. She seemed a little taken aback when Koons arrived later to join me for dinner. (He had made his arrangements separately, through Jean-Pierre Moullé.) For a while, she stood by our table making small talk, while the pastry chefs bustled around in their white coats, baking trays of semolina cookies. But there was a coolness to her manner, and she soon left to join friends.

"Alice and I don't have the juiciest of relationships anymore," Koons told me later. "There's no mutuality there. I wholeheartedly support her vision—if I had an extra five million to give, I'd write one check. But I don't think that she's a big supporter of Todd Koons." Waters seemed to agree. "Todd has gone on another trajectory," she said. "I don't know what I think of it. He wasn't growing organically, I know, and that is for me a bottom line. That is the most important part."

When dinner was served, Koons's mâche was not on the menu. Cannard grows it for the restaurant, but only in the winter, when it can stand full sunlight. Any other time, he says, "It just turns it into soft, uniform, pappy stuff." Even Moullé admitted, regretfully, that he couldn't allow his old friend's salad bags at Chez Panisse: the restaurant has an all-organic policy.

Koons didn't seem to mind; he's used to such snubs by now. Whenever he drives to Berkeley in his Toyota Land Cruiser (a gas-guzzling S.U.V. that he actually needs to negotiate his farm's rough terrain), someone will put a sticker on it: "Ask Me What I'm Doing to Change the Climate." Koons is always tempted to put a sticker next to it that says, "Ask Me What I'm Doing to Feed Your Face." Still, he understands the sentiment. When he was growing up, his parents used to walk through grocery stores marking products they approved of with a handmade stamp of a little superhero. Like Waters, they were idealists who lived according to the principles they preached. But not everyone can raise his own rabbits, or live in the country's most luxuriant agricultural state.

"We are trying to serve mâche to the masses," Koons said. "And in the end we'll probably get pounded anyway. That's part of the thrill: to see how many mouths we can feed before we get pounded." As he spoke, the waiter placed a small, trembling tower of panna cotta in front of him, afloat in a shallow pool of magenta syrup. The custard was made with organic milk and cream from nearby dairies; the syrup with roses grown in the chef's own garden. Koons stopped to admire it—so simple, so lovely, so true to its intent—then tore into it with a spoon. He was hungry, after all. ◆

FICTION

THE CAFETERIA IN THE EVENING AND A POOL IN THE RAIN

BY YOKO OGAWA

Juju and I moved here on a foggy morning in early winter. There wasn't that much to move—just an old wardrobe, a desk, and a few boxes. It was simple enough. Sitting on the enclosed porch, I watched the small truck rattle off into the mist. Juju sniffed around the house, checking the cinderblock wall and the glass panel in the door, as if to reassure himself about his new home. He made little grumbling noises as he worked, his head cocked to one side.

The fog was rolling away in gentle waves. It was not the sort of suffocating fog that swallows everything; in fact, this fog seemed pure and almost transparent, like a cool, thin veil that you could reach out and touch. I stared at it for a long time, leaning against the boxes, until I felt as if I could see each milky droplet. Juju had grown tired of sniffing and was curled up at my feet. Feeling a chill on my back, I peeled away the tape on the box I had been leaning against, pulled out a sweater, and put it on. A bird flew straight into the fog and disappeared.

My fiancé fell in love with the house first.

"Doesn't it seem a little old-fashioned?" I said, rubbing my finger over a faded storm shutter.

"Old, but good and sturdy," he said, looking up at a thick pillar.

"The stove and the hot-water heater are ancient," I said as I turned a knob on the oven. It made a dry, clicking sound. The tiles on the kitchen walls had been carefully scrubbed, but they were chipped in places and the cement underneath showed through in an elaborate geometric pattern.

"This is amazing," he said to the woman from the real-estate office. "The stove is German, and practically an antique. It must be quite rare."

"It is," she said, nodding emphatically. "It was left behind by a German student who rented the place several years ago. It's a genuine German stove." She stressed the word "German."

"Then it should never break down," he said and smiled at me.

We inspected the bedroom, the bathroom, and the living room, checked the doors, looked for rust on the pipes, and counted the electrical outlets. It didn't take long. All the rooms were small but cozy. As we came to the porch, he looked out at the yard through the glass doors. It was completely bare. No plants, no flower beds, nothing at all except an occasional patch of clover.

"Let's take it," he said. "It would be perfect for Juju, too."

"It would be good for Juju," I agreed.

The most important thing was that we'd found a place where we could live with Juju. Beyond that, there was very little we could do to prepare for our marriage, particularly since everyone we knew seemed to be against it. Whenever we told someone that we were considering the possibility, we'd get a sombre look and a long pause. "You should really give yourselves time to think this over," we were invariably told. The reasons were familiar ones. He was divorced. He'd been trying to pass the bar exam for ten years. He had high blood pressure and suffered from migraines. The difference in our ages was excessive, and we were very poor.

Juju yawned. He lay in the yard now, in an elegant sprawl, his black and brown spots vivid against a patch of clover. The fog was thinning, and there were rays of sunlight here and there.

It occurred to me that I should be doing something. I could put up new curtains or paint the bathroom, or I could line the closets with mothballs; in fact, there were any number of improvements to be made to this old house. In three weeks, my fiancé and I would be married—a small ceremony, with only the two of us present—and then he would move here. In the meantime, it was up to me to get the house ready.

But for now I just wanted to watch the fog. There was no need to hurry, and I was determined to take full advantage of these last three weeks of my single life.

The next day it rained. It was raining when I woke up, and it rained all day without a break. Fine, threadlike drops slid down the window one after another. The house across the way, the telephone poles, Juju's kennel—everything was quietly soaking up water.

I made almost no progress with the boxes. The morning passed while I reread old letters and flipped through photo albums, and suddenly it was noon. I thought about making something to eat, but I didn't have proper dishes or utensils in the kitchen. And it was too much trouble to go out for something in the rain. In the end, I boiled water for instant soup and gnawed on some crackers I kept for emergencies. The German stove lit immediately.

The unfamiliar room and the crumbly cracker in my mouth made the sound of the rain seem particularly sad. I wanted to hear my fiancé's voice, but there was no telephone. No television or radio or stereo, either. With nothing else to do, I went to the front hall, where Juju was lying on the floor, and scooped him up in my arms. Startled, he wriggled and wagged his tail with delight.

In the afternoon, I decided to repaint the bathroom. Like the other rooms in the house, it was quite small—just a porcelain tub, a chrome faucet, and a towel rack. Still, it didn't feel cramped, perhaps because the ceiling was high and there was a large window. The room had been painted a romantic shade of pink, by the German student, I guessed. There were faint traces of color on the edges of the tiles, but it had faded after long years of steam and soap.

I changed into old clothes and put on rubber gloves. I turned on the ventilation fan and opened the window. It was still raining.

The fresh paint looked better on the walls than I had expected, and the bathroom soon seemed bright and inviting. Occasionally, a drop of rain would come in through the window, landing on an area that I had just painted. I moved the brush carefully, concentrating on getting an even coat. When I was about half done, the buzzer on the front door rang. It was the first time I had heard it, and it took me by surprise. There was something wild about the sound, like the cry of an animal.

When I opened the door, I found a boy, perhaps three years old, and a man in his thirties, who appeared to be the boy's father. They wore identical clear-plastic raincoats with the hoods pulled up over their heads. The coats were dripping wet, and rain fell from them onto the floor.

"We're sorry to bother you on such a rainy day," the man said, without introducing himself or saying why he had come. "Have you just moved in?"

I was a bit taken aback. "Well," I answered vaguely.

"It's a nice neighborhood," the man

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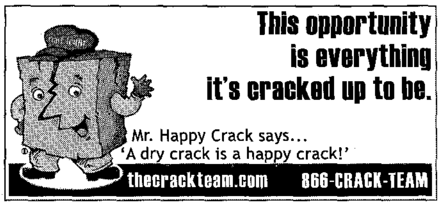

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continued, glancing over at Juju, who was stretched out on the floor. "Near the ocean, but still very peaceful." The child stood quietly, holding tightly to his father's hand. His yellow boots, as tiny as toys, were also covered with raindrops. There was a silence.

"Are you suffering some anguish?" the man asked abruptly. When I heard this, I realized that he was probably a member of some sort of cult. Proselytizers from these groups often pick days when the weather is bad, and they often bring children with them—which never fails to throw me. Still, there was something about these two that felt different from those I had encountered before. In fact, there was something that set them apart from anyone else who had ever come to my door.

To begin with, they were empty-handed. No pamphlets or books or cassettes. They didn't even have umbrellas. They just stood there holding hands, with their free arms dangling straight down at their sides. They seemed the picture of simple modesty.

Furthermore, neither of them was smiling—certainly not the insistent, overconfident smile you see on the faces of religious fanatics. On the other hand, they didn't appear sullen or antisocial, either. I had the impression that they might vanish if I stared at them for too long. Yet, despite this fragile quality, their appearance made a deep impression on me.

I'm not sure why, but I decided to try to answer the man's question. I repeated the word "anguish" to myself a few times, but the meaning remained somehow out of reach, as if it were an unfamiliar philosophical term. As they waited, they stood looking at Juju and me, the rain still dripping from their coats.

"That's a very difficult question," I said, hesitating a moment longer.

"It is indeed," the man said.

"First off, I'm not really sure that I understand the meaning of the word 'anguish.' In a manner of speaking, the rain in winter, wet boots, or this dog lying here in the doorway could all be considered a kind of anguish."

"You're right about that," the man said, nodding several times. "Almost anything can seem elusive once you try to define it." After that, he said nothing more. It was an awkward silence, the kind you can't pretend not to notice. I could have asked them to leave, could have told them I was busy. After all, I was in the middle of painting. The fact that I didn't probably had something to do with the peculiar aura they seemed to emit.

"Do I absolutely have to answer? I'm not sure I see any link between you and me and your question. I'm here, you're there, and the question is floating between us—and I don't see any reason to change anything about that situation. It's like the rain falling without a thought for the dog's feelings." I looked down, running my finger over the spots of paint on my clothes.

"The rain falling without a thought for the dog's feelings." He repeated the words quietly to himself. Juju threw his head back and yawned. "I think you could say that that's a perfect response, and I don't need to bother you anymore. We'll be going now. Goodbye."

The man bowed politely, and a moment later the boy gave a quick nod. Then they disappeared into the rain. It was a straightforward departure, without fanfare or a lingering farewell. For a minute, I stood there wondering why they had come and where they were going, but then I remembered my painting and I thought no more about it. As I closed the door, I noticed that there were two puddles where they had stood.

I hung a spice rack on the wall in the kitchen, waxed the floor in the hall, and planted a flower bed in one corner of the yard, and before I knew it several days had passed. I moved around the house doing my chores in silence. There was so much to do and, moreover, the wedding was so close that I wasn't a bit lonely, despite being alone. Still, now and then, when I needed a change of scenery, I took Juju out for a walk.

We wandered about looking for the things we would need for our life in the new house—a bank, a salon, a drugstore. The neighborhood could hardly be called lively, but it had all the basics. From time to time, we'd pass an old person, out for a quiet stroll.

Early one afternoon, after making our way through a maze of narrow streets, we climbed a slope and found ourselves on a sunny embankment that ran along the shore. Beyond the bank, a thin line of sea blended with the blue sky. Freighters dotted the horizon. Juju broke into a run, and his chain snapped taut, glistening in the sunlight. Everything seemed to be bathed in a peaceful warmth.

As we walked along the bank, the sea gradually spread out before us. Seagulls flew by, so close that it seemed I could reach out and touch them. A red mail truck passed us, moving slowly. At the base of the embankment there was an elementary school. It was an ordinary three-story building of reinforced concrete, with a gymnasium attached, the usual boxes for the students' shoes by the door, and a rabbit hutch in one corner of the playground. Juju suddenly dashed down the grassy slope, heading straight for the back entrance to the school. I had no choice but to follow him, and that's how I found them, standing by a window at the gate.

Except for the raincoats, they looked exactly the same. Holding hands and standing very still. I was sure that they wouldn't remember me, but the man seemed to make the connection right away.

"Sorry to have bothered you the other day," he said with the same polite bow.

"Not at all," I said, bowing quickly in turn. Juju was pacing between us, rattling his chain in excitement. The boy couldn't take his eyes off the dog. "Are you working?" I asked, wondering whether "work" was the right word.

"No. We're taking a short break," the man answered.

I hadn't been able to tell from their raincoats, but they were extremely well dressed. The man wore an elegant dark-green suit, and the boy wore a pure-wool sweater and spotless white kneesocks. For the early afternoon and in such an unlikely neighborhood, they were quite conspicuous.

"That's a nice dog."

"Thank you."

"What is he called?"

"His name is Juju. Your son is pretty cute, too."

"Thanks."

"How old is he?"

"Three years and two months." After that exchange, there seemed to be nothing else for us to talk about. Silence blew in like the wind, and I was reminded that the only thing that remained between us was "anguish." I was tempted to make my escape before he said the word again, but the fleeting shadow in his eyes held me there.

The area around the back gate of the school was awash with noise: a recorder-and-organ ensemble was playing in the music room, children were running on the playground, a teacher was whistling, and the faint moan of a ship's horn rose from the sea. I looked down at the ground and tried to separate each individual sound from the others. Juju had found a spot that suited him; he was curled up by one of the gateposts.

"Can I pet your dog?" the boy asked suddenly. It was the first time I had heard him speak, but his voice was strong and clear.

"Of course," I said, relieved that someone had broken the silence. "He likes it if you stroke him here," I added, rubbing Juju's neck. Juju closed his eyes and licked my cheek with his pale-pink tongue. The boy let go of his father's hand and reached out timidly to pat Juju's hindquarters. His chubby little fingers disappeared into the spotted fur.

"Do you have business here at the school?" I asked, turning back to the man.

"No, we were just looking at the cafeteria." He pronounced the word "cafeteria" slowly, as if it had special significance, and he glanced at the large window next to us.

"The cafeteria?"

"Yes," he nodded.

The window clearly belonged to the cafeteria. Lunch had apparently just ended, and the dishes were being washed. Large birdcage-like baskets crammed with plates and bowls and spoons were moving along conveyor belts at an easy pace, like horses on a carrousel. Along the belts, there were various stations that resembled the disinfectant showers at swimming pools. When a basket reached a station, it would disappear for a few seconds into a haze of liquid spraying from nozzles on all sides and then reëmerge on the other side, wet and shining.

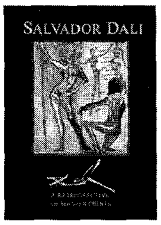
"For some reason, it fascinates him. He would watch it all day if I let him."

"I wonder what he finds so interesting?"

"I don't know. Children get obsessed with the strangest things." The man smiled for the first time in my presence—not the smile of a cult member, of course, but something much simpler and more natural.

"I'm not sure I see the connection between a sweet little boy like this and a cafeteria."

"Perhaps it's some strange complex



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circuit that's impossible for us to imagine," the man murmured. The boy had quickly grown comfortable with Juju and was now pulling his tail and draping himself over his back. Juju was patiently tolerating this treatment.

In the cafeteria, workers in white uniforms, masks, and caps made their way back and forth among the conveyor belts. One of them adjusted the direction of the shower nozzles while another took the clean dishes from the end of the belt to the dryer. They hurried about in silence, and the whole place—the machines, the floors, the windows—seemed to sparkle with cleanliness. It looked more like a small, efficient factory than a school cafeteria.

"In fact, it's much more interesting to watch in the morning," the man said.

"Really?" We were lined up now, leaning against the window.

"Of course. They have to prepare lunch for more than a thousand children—a thousand rolls, a thousand fried shrimp, a thousand slices of lemon, a thousand cartons of milk. Can you imagine?"

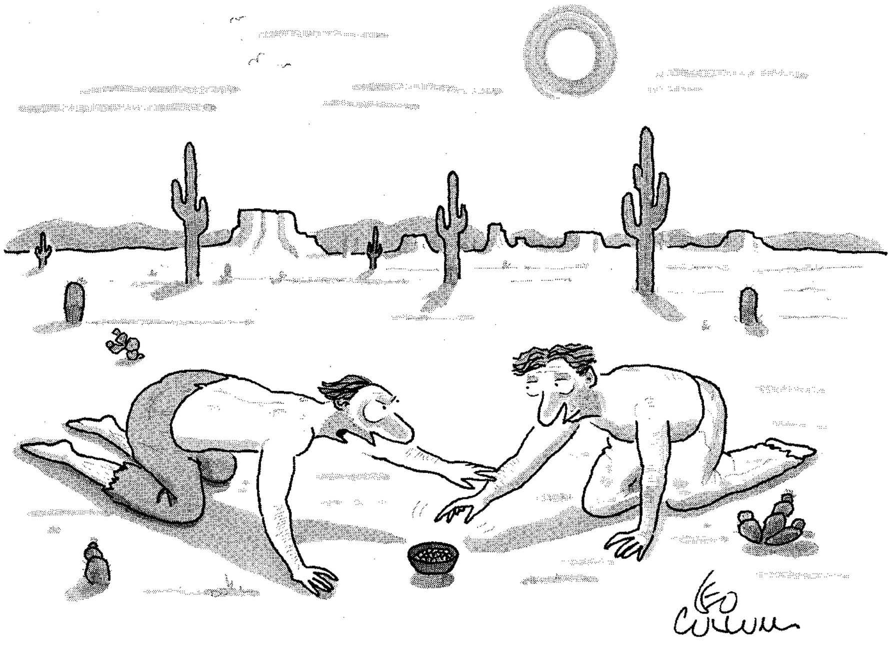
I shook my head.

"When such vast amounts of food are spread out in front of you, even a grownup can't help being impressed." He rubbed at the fogged window, and as he did his hand came so close to my face that I was afraid he could feel my breath. His fingers were long and slender. "A thousand onions, ten kilos of butter, fifty litres of vegetable oil, a hundred boxes of spaghetti. Everything is perfectly calculated, and it runs like clockwork. They've got all the latest equipment; they just have to program the computer for fried shrimp—I think the control room is on the second floor—and the machines start making it. There's even a machine to devein the shrimp. Amazing, no?" He glanced over at me and then looked back at the cafeteria.

"The shrimp are all lined up lengthwise on a conveyor belt, and at a certain point a blade comes out and slices straight down their backs. It never misses by even a hair. If you stare at it too long, it makes you dizzy. Then the shrimp move on to other stations, where they're rolled in flour and eggs and bread crumbs; it's all perfectly arranged so that they get evenly coated without anything being wasted. At the end of the belt, they drop into the oil, as meekly as if they'd been hypnotized. And, finally, they're lifted out at just the right moment so that they're done to a perfect golden brown, never over- or undercooked."

The man closed his eyes for a minute. The dish-washing continued, and no one seemed to pay any attention to us. From the music room now, I could hear the sound of castanets and triangles.

"You describe it beautifully," I said. "I can just picture them—a thousand fried shrimp coming down the line."



"Don't—they'll only make you thirstier."

"I'm glad," he said, running his hand lightly through his hair. I caught a faint whiff of cologne, like the fresh scent of the sea.

"But how long does the washing go on?" I asked, as basket after basket passed by.

"Until around the time the children get out of school."

"You seem to know a lot about it," I said. "A real cafeteria expert."

"Not at all," he said, smiling timidly. "We've been making the rounds in this neighborhood for almost a month, and we stop here every day. We come when my son is in a bad mood, or sometimes when I need a break. There was no cafeteria at the school in the neighborhood where we were before this, and it seemed a little sad. Of all the cafeterias we've seen, this one is definitely first class." Unable to think of anything to say, I just nodded. I had never given any thought to the idea that there might be different classes of cafeteria.

"So you go around to different neighborhoods and canvass or do missionary work. Is that it?" When I did speak, I chose my words as carefully as I could.

"Well, yes, something like that." As soon as I mentioned his work, he became less talkative; it was as if he were more comfortable with the word "cafeteria" than with "anguish." Tired of petting Juju, the boy came and stood between us. Strands of the dog's fine hair clung to the front of his sweater.

"Daddy, what are they having for lunch tomorrow?"

"Hamburgers, I'd say."

"How do you know?"

"I saw them bringing the meat grinder from the storeroom, the one that looks like a big snow-cone machine. So I'm pretty sure."

"Great!" the boy said. The man wiped the window again, and for a few minutes I just studied their two profiles reflected in the glass.

Little by little, everything was being arranged. Some friends sent a quilt as a wedding present, our white dishes were lined up on the shelves, and the washing machine was installed. All these items waited quietly for our new life to begin.

My fiancé came one Sunday and extended the porch to make a drying rack for clothes. He had found some cheap lumber for posts, which he embedded in deep holes in the yard. Then he sanded down bamboo poles until they were smooth and ran them between the posts. When he had finished, we sat on the porch for a while and admired his handiwork.

We couldn't afford a phone, so we had to send telegrams when we wanted to get in touch with each other. Some of them were about important matters—"Wedding rehearsal at church, next Saturday, 10 A.M." or "File for change of address A.S.A.P."—but others were simpler. There was one that was only two words long: "Good night." This one came just as I was getting into bed, and that made it especially sweet. Standing in my pajamas in the dim light of the hallway, I must have read those two words fifty times. Each letter seemed to sink into my mind. Juju, who had been roused from a deep sleep by the delivery, watched me disapprovingly through half-open eyes.

After our meeting, I made a habit of walking along the embankment above the school whenever I took Juju out. But I didn't see anyone at the gate again. Nor could I see into the cafeteria window from the top of the bank, no matter how much I looked. It seemed to be covered with something opaque, though I could never tell whether it was steam or spray or what. Once, I saw a truck with the logo of a chicken company on its side parked near the gate. As I walked along the bank, I pictured the birds, splayed out on the conveyor belt, eyes staring vacantly as they moved through the various carefully designed steps that would convert them into fried chicken.

I finally met the man and his son again one afternoon ten days later. They were sitting on some boxes that had been left under the cafeteria window. The boy was wearing a warm wool cap with a pompom. His legs dangled over the edge of the box. The man was staring off into the distance, his chin resting in his hands. Juju saw them first and ran tumbling down the hill, his tail wagging furiously.

"It's Juju!" the boy called in his clear, piercing voice as he jumped down from

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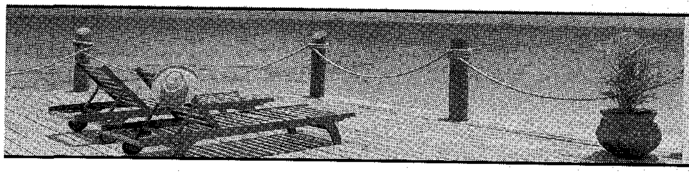

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the box. The pompom bobbed on top of his cap.

"Hello," I gasped, breathless from having been pulled along behind Juju.

"Hello," the man answered with the same ambiguous smile. The box they'd been sitting on had held carrots: on top was a picture of a fresh, bright-orange carrot. The other boxes in the stack had held frozen squid, pudding, corn, and Worcestershire sauce.

The schoolchildren had already gone home for the day, and the music room and the playground were quiet. The yard was in shadow, and silence filled the school like stagnant water. The rabbits huddled together in a corner of their hutch.

The cafeteria, too, seemed empty. The window was clear now, and I could see all sorts of details that had been obscured before: the shine of the stainless-steel serving counter; the cut of the collars on the white uniforms hanging on the wall; the color of the switch on the conveyor belt.

"They seem to be done for the day," I said, sitting down next to the man.

"Yes, they just finished," he answered.

Juju ran around in the last rays of sunlight, dragging his chain, while the boy ran after him, trying to catch his tail. Beyond them, the sun was sinking into the sea, dyeing the water a deep amber that seemed to swallow up the waves, the boats, the lighthouse, and everything else. Seagulls were flying among the masts in the deserted marina.

"I'm sorry he keeps pestering Juju."

"Not at all. Juju seems to love it."

"How long have you had him?"

"It's been ten years. I've spent almost half my life with him, so he's part of all my most important memories. It's like those photos that come with the date printed on them—all I have to do is remember how big Juju was or what kind of collar he was wearing and I can figure out when something happened."

"I understand," he said, kicking at a pebble with the toe of his plain brown shoe.

After that, we talked about dogs for a while. I told him about discovering a dog zoo in a hot-springs resort in the mountains, and about the hysterical pregnancy suffered by a Maltese that used to live next door to me. He asked various questions, nodding solemnly at my answers, and from time to time he even smiled.

"When I see a cafeteria in the evening, it makes me think of a pool in the rain."

We had exhausted the subject of dogs and fallen silent for a minute when he introduced this new—and apparently inscrutable—topic. The line sounded as if it had been plucked from a modernist poem or else from some old nursery rhyme.

"A pool . . . in the rain?" I repeated, trying out each word.

"That's right—a pool in the rain. Have you ever been in a swimming pool in the rain?"

"I'm not sure."

"When I think about a pool in the rain, it's almost more than I can stand."

The clouds had become striated with pink, tinting the sky a deep rose color. Evening had overtaken us as we talked. His face was close to mine, and I traced the outline of his features with my eyes. I could feel his breath, his pulse, the heat from his body. He coughed quietly and rubbed his temple with his forefinger before he spoke again.

"I didn't know how to swim when I was in elementary school, so the time my class spent in the pool was painful for me. You could even say that I learned everything there was to know about suffering right there in that pool. First, there was fear. The water in the pool seemed to bear down on me with a terrible crushing force. It was horrible. And then there was shame. Children who couldn't swim had to wear special red bathing caps to make them stand out among the black-and-white striped ones that all the other children wore. Since we couldn't swim, we'd just bob on the surface at the shallow end. I was determined to learn to swim and prove myself, but what I really wanted was to avoid attracting any attention at all. That's another thing I learned from the pool: determination."

WAITING FOR A RIDE

Standing at the baggage, passing time:
Austin, Texas, airport—my ride hasn't come yet.
My former wife is making Web sites from her home,
one son's seldom seen,
the other one and his wife have a boy and girl of their own.
My wife and stepdaughter are spending weekdays in town
so she can get to high school.
My mother, ninety-six, still lives alone and she's in town, too,
always gets her sanity back just barely in time.
My former former wife has become a unique poet;
most of my work,
such as it is, is done.
Full moon was October 2nd this year,
I ate a mooncake, slept out on the deck,
white light beaming through the black boughs of the pine,
owl hoots and rattling antlers,
Castor and Pollux rising strong—
it's good to know that the polestar drifts!
That even our present night sky slips away,
not that I'll see it.
Or maybe I will, much later,
some far time walking the spirit path in the sky,
that long walk of spirits—where you fall right back into the
"narrow painful passageway of the Bardo"
squeeze your little skull
and there you are again

waiting for your ride

—*Gary Snyder*

He took a deep breath and closed his eyes. Juju, having exhausted himself, lay down and rested his muzzle on his front paws; the boy wrapped himself around the dog's neck as if he were curling up on a sofa.

"And when it rained the pool was even more depressing. The rain that fell on the deck left dark stains, and the surface of the pool boiled with drops, as if a school of tiny fish were waiting for their dinner. I always lowered myself into the water slowly. My classmates would be swimming by on their way to the far end of the pool. In those days, I was quite delicate. My ribs and collarbone seemed to poke right through my skin, even my hips and thighbones. My swimsuit wrinkled up on my backside. I was cold when it rained, even in summer. During the rest period, I shivered behind the faucet we used to rinse our eyes, and every bone in my body seemed to rattle. When swimming class was finally over and I could take off my cap, my hair was always dyed red." He was quiet for a moment, picking at the tape on the box, and then he concluded, "I know this can't be very interesting for you."

"No, it is," I said, quite honestly. "But you still haven't got from the pool in the rain to the cafeteria in the evening. You can't stop until you do!" We looked at each other for a moment and laughed. One of the rabbits in the hutch was watching us as it chewed on a cabbage leaf.

"I was never teased because I couldn't swim. At least, I don't remember anything like that. In the end, it was my own problem. I think you have to go through some sort of rite of passage, at least once in your life, that allows you to become part of the group. This one just took me a little longer than usual. I'm sure that's what it was."

"I think I understand," I said, studying his profile.

"So, whenever I see a cafeteria in the evening I can't help remembering that painful moment in my life—my long rite of passage. Though I suppose that still doesn't explain anything." He looked down and kicked another pebble.

The cafeteria window had begun to darken. Everything had been carefully dried and neatly arranged: the nozzles on the showers, the dish baskets stacked in the corner, the pots on the shelves. I could almost hear the sound of the rain on the tin roof of the swimming-pool changing room. I pictured the slender legs fluttering along the bottom of the pool like so many ailing fish, and the boy with dyed red hair, wrapped in a towel, trembling quietly. One after another, these images floated up in the cafeteria window.

"At about the same time, another thing happened to me," he said. "I stopped being able to eat."

"But why?"

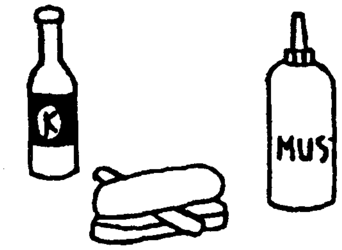
"There were probably a lot of reasons. My various complexes, my timid personality, my family . . . lots of things. But the direct cause was the cafeteria."

"So we're there at last."

"Yes. You see, the problem was that I peeked in the cafeteria one day before lunchtime. I can't remember why I was there at that hour—why I wasn't in class—but for some reason I stood at the back door and watched the commotion as the staff got ready for lunch. I'd never paid any attention to the cafeteria before. This was more than twenty-five years ago, so the kitchen was completely different from this one. It was in an old wooden building, cramped and dark, more like a barn. I can still remember every detail. The menu that day was cream stew and potato salad, and the first thing that struck me was the smell. It was heavy and suffocating, like nothing I'd ever smelled before. There are lots of foul odors in the world, but this one was different and unsettling because it was linked to the food that I would soon be eating. The smells of the vats of stew and the potato salad were mingling in the cafeteria, fermenting, denaturing."

I leaned back on the box. Juju twitched his pointed ears. The child remained wrapped around the dog's neck, perhaps asleep.

"The scene in front of me was all too real, but at the same time it was so far beyond anything I could have imagined that it seemed fantastic. The women who worked in the cafeteria were fat, and their flesh bulged from the elastic cuffs of their uniforms and the tops of their boots. They seemed buoyant, as if they would float when tossed into water. One of them was stirring the stew with a shovel—the sort of metal shovel you'd use in construction. She was flushed, and she kept one foot on the rim of the enormous pot as she worked. And, as she stirred the thick white liquid with her rusty shovel, chunks of fatty meat and bits of onions and carrots churned up before my eyes. The salad was in the next vat. Another woman had climbed into the vat and was crushing the potatoes with her black rubber boots. Each time she lifted her foot, I could see bits of potato clinging to the sole. The more she worked, the more intricate the potato pattern became."



He coughed once and then continued.

"I couldn't look away. I wish I could explain how I felt at that moment, but I can't. If it were a feeling you could sum up with some common word like 'horror' or 'disgust,' then I'm sure I would have forgotten all about it long ago. But before I was overcome by emotions my mind was imprinted with these incomprehensible images—globs of stew dripping from the shovel, boots buried in mashed potatoes."

"And after that you couldn't eat?" I asked quietly, trying to guess where the story was going. He nodded.

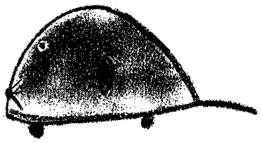
"Even now, the rattle of plastic dishes or the footsteps of someone reporting for kitchen duty can bring back every detail of that scene. It was that awful; and, after that, cafeterias had the same effect on me as pools did. I knew that no matter how hard I flailed I was still going to sink to the bottom, just as I knew that every time I tried to take a bite of cafeteria food the fat ladies with their shovels and boots would be there to make sure that I choked. When I couldn't stand it anymore, I left the house one morning with my backpack, and instead of going to school I wandered through town. Of course, it was a day when my class was scheduled to go to the pool. As I walked along, I kicked the bag with my swimsuit and red bathing cap, keeping it aloft with my knees. It felt as though I wandered for a long time, but in reality my grandfather found me after a couple of hours."

"So you were back in school by lunchtime?"

"No, I was lucky. My grandfather

wasn't angry at all, and he didn't seem anxious to take me back to school. He had been a skillful tailor in his day, but when he retired he took to drinking and got into all sorts of trouble. To the point that no one in the family wanted to have anything to do with him. He'd get into fights, sleep in the street, destroy traffic lights, that kind of thing. In fact, I'm sure he wasn't out looking for me that morning; he was probably just drunk already and staggering around town. ‘Well, well,’ he said. ‘Fancy meeting you here. It's not often we have an opportunity like this, so I'm going to show you a secret spot.’ Then he took my hand and led me in the opposite direction from school.

“I wasn't usually very comfortable around my grandfather, with his sake breath and his sandpaper palms, but that day I clung tightly to his hand and followed him. In his other hand he held a can of beer, and he occasionally took a sip as we walked. Eventually, we came to a warehouse district at the edge of town, to the ruins of a concrete building. ‘That's it,’ my grandfather said, pointing with his can. It looked like the remains of a factory that had closed long ago. The doors were off the hinges and there were holes in the walls. When we went inside, we could feel the wind blowing straight through. Looking up, I saw patches of sky in the ceiling, as if they'd been cut out with scissors. On the floor was a deep layer of dirt, tinted red with rust, which made a gritty sound at every step. And everywhere were piles of junk: nuts and bolts, springs, batteries, empty soda bottles, a plastic hair band, a harmonica, a thermometer, all sleeping quietly in the dust. There were several solid-looking machines, also thickly coated with dirt and rust, and a ‘Safety First’ sign that had fallen off the wall.



“My grandfather led me to a machine with rows of switches and levers and told me to sit there. It looked like a printing press or perhaps an old-fashioned dryer, but whatever it was it definitely didn't work anymore. I hung my bag over one of the levers.

“My grandfather must have been nearing the end of his beer, because he started peering into the can between sips and the pace of his drinking slowed. ‘Do you know what they used to make here?’ he said. When he spoke, the beer foam on his lips flew off in all directions. Relieved that he still hadn't asked me why I was skipping school, I shook my head encouragingly.

“‘Chocolate,’ he said, almost as if he were boasting.

“‘Chocolate? Really?’ I asked.

“ ‘That's right. They'd put cocoa beans and milk and sugar in that machine over there in the corner, and mix it up good, and out would come liquid chocolate. By the time it reached the next machine, it had cooled a bit and looked more like thick brown syrup. Then when it finally got to this roller here it was turned into a big sheet of chocolate.’ He poked his foot at the machine I was sitting on. ‘A huge chocolate bar, as wide as two tatami mats and as long as you wanted it to be, so long as you let the rollers go!’

“ ‘Are you sure?’ I said, excited by his description of the fantastic chocolate bar.

“ ‘If you think I'm lying, just take a whiff.’

“I stood up on the base of the machine and brought my nose near to the roller, half closing my eyes to get a better scent. I was overcome with a pleasant sensation, as if I were being wrapped up in something large and comforting. Somewhere far off, the cicadas were humming. At first I smelled only iron, a metallic, dry odor. But as I stood there I began to catch a faint hint of a sweet, familiar scent, like a glimpse of a dream.

“ ‘Well?’ my grandfather said.

“ ‘You're right,’ I said, lingering for a moment, my hands resting on the rough roller.

“ ‘If you ever get the urge for chocolate, you can always come here. This roller has made so much chocolate that it's not going to mind if you come and sniff some of it from time to time.’ Having finally finished his beer, he threw the can on the floor. It made a sad, hollow sound as it rolled away. I realized that he probably had no more money to buy alcohol. In order to stop him from drinking too much, he was kept on a tight budget. I reached into my backpack and pulled out the envelope with the money I was supposed to give to my teacher for a school trip.

“ ‘You can buy some more with this,’ I said.

“‘Thanks,’ he said, and I saw the corners of his red eyes wrinkle with delight.”

By the time the man's long story ended, the evening had covered us in shadow. The outline of his face seemed to be vanishing into the darkness. The boy, still sprawled on Juju, lay motionless in the gloom.

I wanted to tell him something, so much that it felt like a weight on my chest. If I didn't, it seemed that his face might actually disappear.

“Is that the end of the story?” I said, taking great care with each word.

“It is.” He gave a slight shake to the hair on his forehead.

“But what happened with your swimming class and the cafeteria?”

“There isn't much to tell. I learned to swim, and my grandfather died of a malignant tumor. That's all.” We sat for a moment staring out at the twilight and then stood up. Time had been suspended as he talked, but now it resumed.

“Time to go home.”

At the sound of his father's voice, the boy opened his eyes. He blinked for a moment, as if trying to recapture his dream. Juju's tail wagged, rubbing against the child's cheek.

“I suppose I'll see you here again,” I said, taking Juju's chain in my hand.

“We move on to a new area tomorrow. A bigger town, closer to the mountains.” The boy ran over to him, and he took his hand. “We'll have to say goodbye to the cafeteria.” On the other side of the window, the kitchen was slowly vanishing, as if sinking into a swamp.

“I hope there's a nice one in your new town,” I said.

He smiled without nodding. “Goodbye,” he said. The boy waved to Juju, and the pompom on his cap shook.

“Goodbye.” I waved, too.

They walked off in the fading light. Juju and I stood watching them until they became a tiny point in the distance and then vanished. I suddenly wanted to read my “Good night” telegram one more time. I could feel the exact texture of the paper, see the letters, feel the air of the night it had arrived. I wanted to read it over and over, until the words melted away. Tightening my grip on the chain, I began to run in the opposite direction. ♦

(*Translated, from the Japanese, by Stephen Snyder.*)

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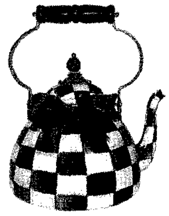

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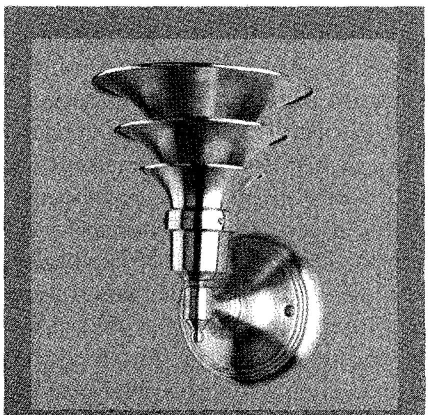

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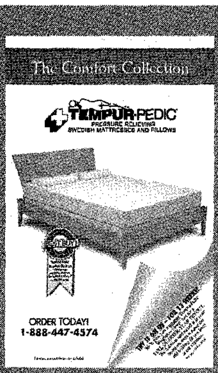

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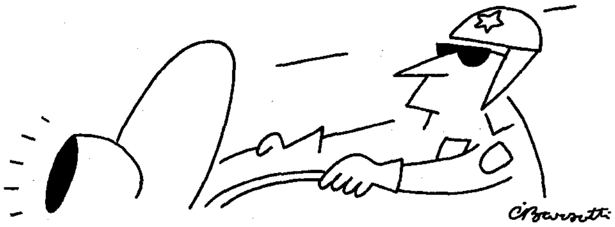

A CRITIC AT LARGE

THROUGH A GLASS DARKLY

What do we talk about when we talk about wine?

BY ADAM GOPNIK

Somewhere in the middle pages of "1984," Winston Smith is being inducted into the shadowy and, as it turns out, nonexistent "Brotherhood" of resistance to Big Brother, and, to celebrate, the Inner Party member O'Brien pours him a glass of wine. Winston has never had wine before, but he has read about it, and he is desperately excited to try it, since he expects it to taste like blackberry jam and to be instantly intoxicating. Instead, of course, the wine tastes the way wine tastes the first time you taste it—a bit acidic and bitter—and a single sip, or glass, isn't intoxicating at all. The intensity of this experience as a model of disappointment was significant enough for Orwell so that he inserted it in his dystopia right there among all the greater horrors—as though the future weren't bad enough, that whole *wine* thing will go on, too.

Fifty years later, we live in a wine world where, for the first time, there are wines that *do* taste like blackberry jam and *are* instantly intoxicating, or nearly so, and how these wines came into being is the subject of a new book, "Noble Rot" (Norton; $24.95), by William Echikson. The book tells the story of the wine life of the Bordeaux region of France over the past twenty years, and, though Echikson does not quite have the narrative skills to assemble it, he lays out all the pieces of a first-class Henry James comedy about the brutality of American innocence, the helplessness of French sophistication, and the need for intoxicants that are always called by some other name and claimed for some other purpose.

"Wine," Saul Steinberg once said, "is the only thing that makes us happy as adults for no reason." Wine books, on the other hand, find a hundred ways of making us unhappy for lots of reasons. The space between what the wine writers say and what the wine novice tastes is a standard subject of satire. (The best was written, exactly contemporary with Orwell, by Stephen Potter in the "Winemanship" section of his peerless "Lifemanship" books.) But some of the wine-writing weakness is more complex. Being an expert on wine and writing about it is what the English call "naff," embarrassing and uncool, while being a non-expert on wine and writing about it anyway sounds merely boozy. No subject produces a literature so anxious, expressed not so much in its grandiosity as in its defensive jokiness and regular-guydom. A book on wine will always begin with the assurance that it is not like all those other books on wine, even though all those other books on wine begin by saying that they're not like those other books on wine, either.

Echikson is no exception, and includes a lot of normal-person-like-you, let's-demystify-this-stuff talk. But he also embarks on some absorbing storytelling, in a form now familiar from ten years of the little-thing/big-thing books: take a micro-history of something or other (cod, salt, the color mauve) and turn it into a macro-history of something else that provides, in parable, a mega-history of some larger third thing. Echikson's micro-history is that of Château d'Yquem, the Bordeaux château that makes the greatest sweet white wine in the world and that, in the past decade, passed from private hands into those of a conglomerate. ("Noble rot" is the term of art for the mold that settles occasionally on some Sémillon grapes and makes them sweeter.) His macro-history is that of the wine region of Bordeaux generally, which also got transformed, though for different reasons, and ended up making bigger, stronger, fatter blackberry-jammish wines. His mega-story is the canonical one of backward France and forward America.

Echikson's approach lands him with a problem that he never really solves: he is telling a big story about dry red wine through the vehicle of the small story of a sweet white wine. While, as a writer, Echikson is not a man who, seeing a cliché go winking by, can easily resist its charms—Gallic tempers rise, tensions flare at the top end of the market, and a golden world of the past seems lost, and that's all one page of the preface—he has the crucial journalist's knack for getting the confidence of people who ought to be wary of talking to him. (And who now are sorry they did: he is being sued for defamation in France.)

The story opens in the early nineteen-seventies, when the cult of claret—well-aged Bordeaux wine—was locked in place, especially in England, which dominated the wine trade as the Germans had earlier dominated the champagne trade. Bordeaux produced hard, tannic wines that often took a decade to be good to drink. (Then they were really good to drink.) Even when they weren't good, though, everyone went on drinking them, because they were claret. The best wines, if far from cheap, were available, not collector's items: anyone with a taste for wine could expect to drink Château Margaux or Château Cheval Blanc more than once in a lifetime, and the lesser *grands crus* were there for everyday drinking. The preëminence of French wines was simply taken for granted, like

MAGNUM

Wine is the only thing that makes us happy as adults for no reason. Photograph by Henri Cartier-Bresson.

"This, my only hit record, was written to help me get over a bad breakup. But I'm told that it has also helped move a fair amount of wrinkle-free, flat-front khakis down at the mall."

• •

the skills of Jewish internists. Within Bordeaux, the classification of 1855—which had fixed the vineyards in a hierarchy of first-, second-, and third-growth classes—still hummed along, dominating everything.

Into this story come two new forces: Japanese money and American numbers. In the mid-seventies, the Japanese developed a taste for expensive French wine, and for buying the big names. This vastly expanded the market and seemed to justify investment in high yields, more grapes, and more land. But it was, as Echikson might put it, a poisoned chalice. It meant that the lower reaches of second- and third-growth wine were now, of necessity, being drunk by Americans in a less equable and accepting mood. In 1976, in Paris, an American Cabernet beat the French Bordeaux in a blind tasting. This was not quite the event that it has since come to seem—to the French winemakers, it was more like an American loss to the Lithuanians in basketball, wrong game at the wrong time—but it did mark a trembling of the earth beneath their feet.

More significant, a lawyer named Robert Parker, from the suburbs of Baltimore, began to mimeograph, and then publish, his own newsletter, *The Wine Advocate*, listing all the châteaux and grading them on a hundred-point system. His virtues were limited: he was a very ordinary writer with few pretensions to the grace notes of French, or even English, wine-writing. What he brought to the table was what Americans always bring: encyclopedic ambitions and a universal numerical system. Not since Bernard Berenson made his lists of true and false Italian pictures had an American expert on the arts so fundamentally changed the economics of European culture. As with Berenson, what mattered was not so much that the list was right—who could tell for sure?—as that the list existed.

In retrospect, it seems that Parker was doing to wine what Bill James was doing to baseball in the same years, and in the same way. Both Parker and James began, in the late seventies, as unknown amateurs with privately printed newsletters, rapidly found a hungry and enthusiastic audience, and by the mid-eighties had become the reigning authorities among people impatient with the old wisdoms. Both were uncannily successful because they were apostles of a radical American empiricism—an insistence that facts and numbers could show you what was really going on, against everything tradition told you. James was weakly predictive, but brilliantly analytic: his explanations of why things had happened were mesmerizing and convincing, but his guesses about what would happen next were often wrong. (His system had the Brewers winning the '82 series.) Parker was weakly analytic but brilliantly predictive; he could never really explain why wines tasted good, but he claimed that the '82 vintage was going to be great, and it was.

The difference was that Parker's game had always belonged to the French. And from the French point of view he was poison. Like all Henry James heroes, Parker was a true American innocent, meaning only to help and purify his European friends. The wines that receive the most consistent and adulatory praise in his system are the conventional favorites of conventional French taste: Château Margaux and Domaine de la Romanée-Conti. No one could have been more single-mindedly rapturous about Château d'Yquem. In France, though, the greatness of those wines was accepted not as effort well rewarded but as the natural order. There had to be not-so-good wines below to have great wines above; the hierarchy was part of the pleasure. Parker assumed that if some wines were not as good as others it was because some winemakers were not doing as good a job.

Although, in a defensive move, the French government gave him the Légion d'Honneur—he cried when he received it—his Francophilia did him no good with the French; the vintners set dogs on him. In the James story, he would marry a French *comtesse* with a fading château, and have to decide whether to be true to his system by rating her wines properly or be true to her and lie. (In the James story, he would lie, and suffer.) Without intending to, he was wrecking the second rank. He was able to do this because, for the first time, there was a solid second rank of claret-style wine in the world, and it wasn't the second growths of Bordeaux.

One common complaint has been that Parker's idea of good was too narrow. People who know wines now disparage Parker for preferring "flavor bombs,"

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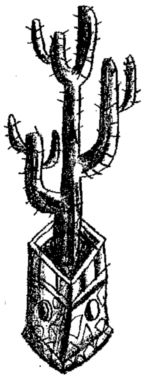
big wines that are exploding with fruit and alcohol, and which showed up better in tastings—with the not very convincing implication that there is something second-rate about liking such blackberry-jam wines. But the essential "character" of many of the wines that he ruled out was the quality of being not very good.

Meanwhile, beginning in the nineteen-eighties, there was more good wine around than ever before, and most of it was coming, as it still does, from the then underexploited warm-weather vineyards of other continents. It is hard to find a less than delicious bottle of Australian Syrah or South African Cabernet or California Zinfandel, or, these days, New Zealand Pinot Noir. Even Southern Italy, and Sicily in particular, began to fall into line. Mouton Cadet, the old standard Bordeaux plonk, has almost disappeared from dinner tables.

In this way, Parker's achievement wasn't so much to Americanize French wine as to Southernize Northern palates—to favor the fruitier and more forward wines common to South Africa and California and Australia over the drier and more astringent tastes of young Bordeaux and old Burgundy. He liked wines that tasted good. His favorite French wines, the ones he loves from the heart ("This is the kind of wine I would drink if I were not always tasting," he once wrote plaintively, apropos a simple Guigal Côtes du Rhône), are Southern, too, from the Rhône valley. An "educated" palate may seek to explain why this is a limiting taste, but is unlikely to win over the Winston Smiths. It is a little like the educated eye trying to explain why Poussin is better than Rubens; people may listen, but they look at those thighs, and doubt.



The French response to Parker and Parkerism is Echikson's real subject. Once Parker had established his reputation, the French had to decide whether to fight or to change, and they changed. Echikson's heroes are the *garagistes* and "right bankers," the winemakers from the wrong bank of the Gironde, who, one by one, are either taking control of old estates or making their own wine in the back yard. Following his heroes from château to château, Echikson gives a strong hint throughout that making good wine is more like making good peanut butter than it is like writing great poetry. Low yields (meaning not too many grapes per hectare), sweet fruit allowed to ripen as long as possible (there is always pressure on growers to harvest early, because of the threat of a late rain or an early frost), no stems, minimal "handling"—the formula is pretty simple. Wine is good grape juice gone bad, and, as many of the new French winemakers seem to suggest to Echikson under their breaths, there is something to be said for the Australian system where grapes are collected from around the country, sorted through, and fermented in great big well-controlled vats, and *terroir* be damned.

Echikson ends with a toast to "breathing new life into Bordeaux's old order." But the reader, even one with Parkerized tastes, may, on reflection, find the French objections to Parker's lists and numbers more complicated than Echikson allows. The debate is not about whether the numbers are right but whether it is right to have numbers. Everyone agrees that Parker is, on his own terms, a completely honest scorer; but by scoring he intends to serve the consumer, and makes the wine drinker into one. What consumers want is reliable beverage products, and, once wine is a reliable beverage product, it isn't quite wine.

Demanding absolute excellence on an unchanging universal numerical scale is not, after all, our usual measure of sensual engagement. A man who makes love to fifty-some women and then publishes a list in which each one gets a numerical grade would not be called a lady's man. He would be called a cad. And that, more or less, is how a good many Frenchmen think of Parker: they don't doubt his credentials; they question his character. A real man likes moles and frailties; a real man marries his wine, as he marries his wife, and sees her through the thin spots. Being impatient with the tannins in a Margaux is like being impatient with the lines on your wife's face. They are what makes it a marriage rather than a paid assignation.

For one of the defining characteristics of most French *terroirs* is not to make very good wine. To alter that is to put them in the beverage business. No one says this, exactly—but when you are handed a glass of thin and astringent country wine in France and asked to admire it for its character, there is a reasonable point in which its character does consist in its having some. The French connoisseur believes that, with his glass of turpentiney Gascon wine, he is in a truer relation to history and reality than the American searching for his jammy high-scorers. I wouldn't actually drink like this, but I understand it.

Of course, if the ladies were offering their favors at forty dollars a go, it would seem fair for somebody to grade them, and that is, more or less, what Parker's defenders say: a product that is being bought and sold should be subject to the market discipline of all other things that are bought and sold, and all the guff about earth and history and the ineffable singularity is just a way of avoiding giving the customer what he ought to get for his money.

Well, what *does* make wine taste bad or good? Is there really a standard, or a way to agree on one? Within the heart of every wine drinker, there is the suspicion that no one really knows. I was once at a dinner in Paris, seated by a big "name" in wine tasting, and, along about the third bottle, she leaned in and announced, half gaily and half conspiratorially, "You know, it's really all about the same." Of course, she didn't actually believe that—but I also had the sense that in another way she did believe it, that she was confiding something significant about her own profession.

As Calvin Trillin explained in these pages a while ago, if you simply put red food coloring in white wine, even experienced drinkers can't tell it from red wine. And, according to scientists who study smell and taste, that's just the beginning. Rachel Herz, a professor of psychology at Brown, conducts research into the effects of "frames" on the perception of smells. (Wine tasters are "noses" first of all.) Smells, she reports, "are so malleable when it comes to verbal context that when reasonable verbal information is available it will override and even replace the olfactory information." The effect is pronounced when the smells are, in some way, ambiguous—tell people that they're smelling vomit, and they'll smell vomit; tell them that the same smell is Parmesan cheese, and they'll smell Parmesan cheese. With wine, the most basic verbal categories (it comes from France, it comes from America, it's cheap, it's expensive) seem to be able to throw even an educated nose off track. The illusions, Herz suggests, "work the way, in a familiar illusion, arrowheads either going in or feathering out extend or shorten straight lines. Word labels on smells are the same kind of context effect, and these context effects are markedly more powerful with nose sensations than they are with other kinds."

To make things worse, the nose turns out to have the shortest memory of all the senses. A simple experiment, Herz suggests, shows just how powerful nose amnesia is: think of a familiar tune—say, "Yesterday." Now think of a familiar picture—say, the "Mona Lisa." Now think of the smell of a tuna-fish sandwich. You can do the last, of course, but where the other sensory memories are strong, clear, and sharp, the tuna-fish sandwich smell is general and vague. What the nose knows, in effect, is not much, and that soon forgotten. (Wine lovers protest violently when they are told this, but their protest, from the academic point of view, is a bit like the protest of eyewitnesses who are sure they saw what they say they saw.)

Yet to accept this is not to say that the elaborate language of wine evaluation is necessarily phony. It is exactly because smells are so labile and hard to grasp that they need more help from words than other sensations. When it comes to wine, we are all like early-Alzheimer's patients who have to be coaxed into memory and appreciation. ("Remember, Dad—that's the woman we saw on the beach at Wellfleet." "Oh, yes! Her.")

The real question is not whether wine snobs and wine writers are big phonies but whether they are any bigger phonies than, say, book reviewers or art critics. For with those things, too, context effects are overwhelming. All description is impressionistic, and all impressions are interpretive. Colors and shapes don't emerge from pictures in neat, particulate packages to strike the eye, either, any

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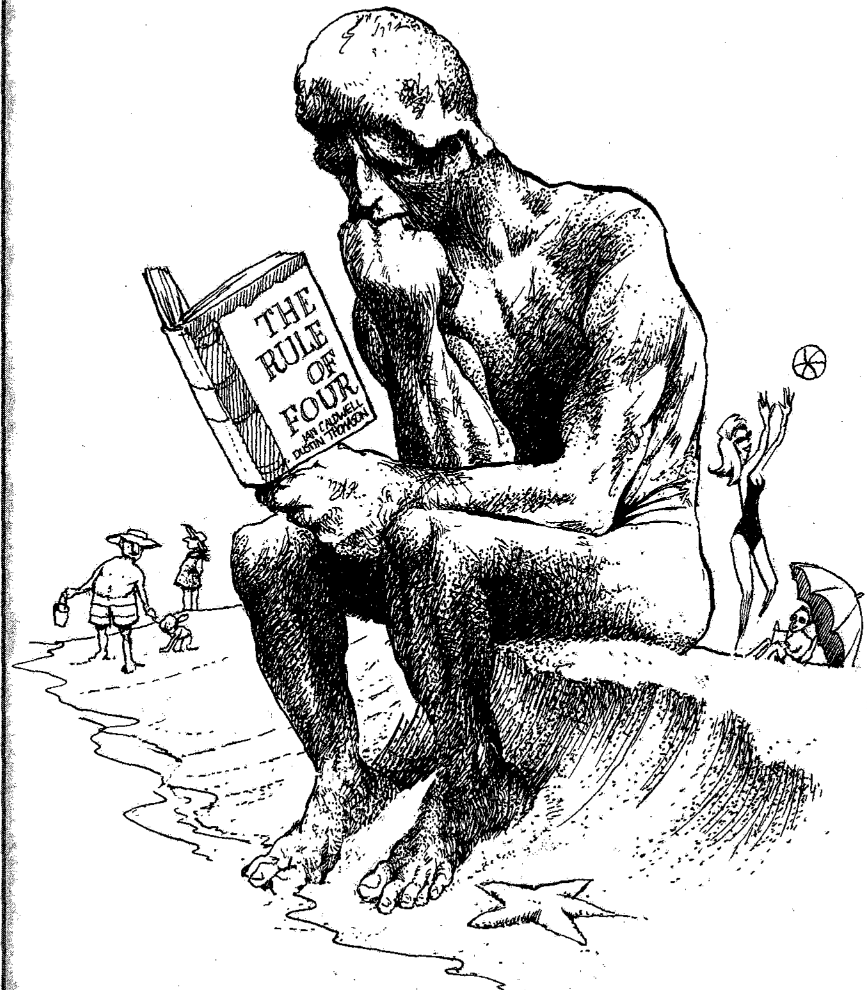

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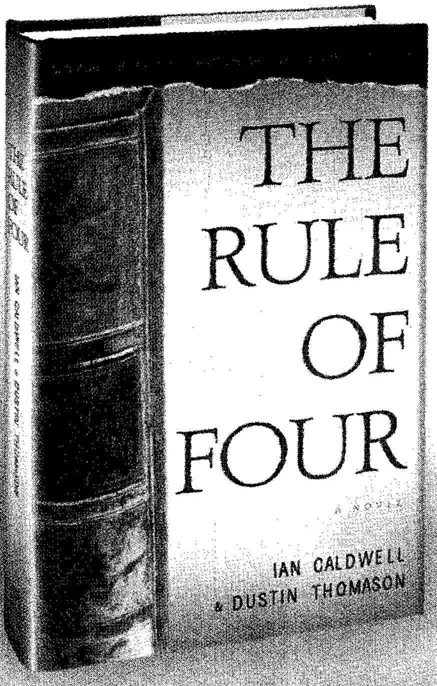

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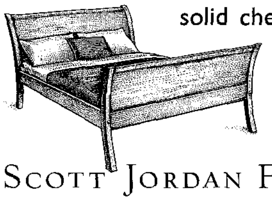

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more than plots and themes come direct to the mind from the pages of books. Everything is framed by something.

Anyway, no elaborate rhetoric of compliments is meant to be "accurate"; it is meant to be complimentary. When Shakespeare compares his lover to a summer's day, he doesn't really mean that she (or he) is like a summer's day in that she is hotter in the middle and cooler in the end—though, then again, he might. Wine writing is of the same type: a series of elaborately plausible compliments paid to wines. When the French wine writer Eric Glatre declares, say, that in the aroma of a bottle of Krug "intense empyreumatic fragrances of toasted milk bread, fresh butter, café au lait, and afterthoughts of linden join in a harmonious chorus with generous notes of acacia honey, mocha, and vanilla," he is suggesting that, of all the analogies out there, this might be one that expands our minds, opens our horizons, delights our imaginations. He is offering a metaphor, not an account book.

In this way, the intersection of French sensibility and modern science suggests not so much the limits of Parker as the limits of naïve American empiricism: numbers and honesty and transparency only get you so far in the world. Our experiences of everything are too mediated—by contexts and intentions and likeness—to be summed up in a number. It is exactly the disputable quality of the compliments we pay to wine that makes them touch the lower edge of art. *De gustibus solum est disputandum.* Only matters of taste are worth arguing over.

Between the rhetorical and the real lies ritual. And wine is a ritual thing before it is any other kind of thing. In a remarkable new book, "Ancient Wine" (Princeton; $29.95), the archeologist Patrick E. McGovern shows that six thousand years ago an entire "wine culture" was already associated with special serving and drinking vessels. From the beginning, wine and wine culture has been a halfway house between the sacramental and the social. The question about ritualized aesthetic discriminations is not whether they exist—they exist in the minds of the people who feel them; that's enough—but what they are about. For the wine snob, they are about the ability to make them, and this is just sad. For the French wine critic—a generalized type, but one who exists—they are about the ability to put a map inside your mind: to taste tastes and see places. For the American wine critic, they are about the ability to offer consumers a quality beverage.

What they rarely seem to be about is drinking wine. Remarkably, nowhere in wine writing, including Parker's and Echikson's, would a Martian learn that the first reason people drink wine is to get drunk. To read wine writing, one would think that wine is simply another luxury food, like smoked salmon or caviar or chocolate; the one idea that is banished is that it is a powerful drug, which can wash away, in a few minutes, the ability to discriminate at all. The end of food writing is to turn eating into a metaphor for wanting, of all kinds. The end of wine writing is to turn drinking into a metaphor for judging. Since we know that this is false, we feel the falsity, and the pathos of the falsity.

For it is not wine that makes us happy for no reason; it is alcohol that makes us happy for no reason. Wine is what gives us a reason to let alcohol make us happy without one. Without wine lore, and wine tasting, and wine talk, and wine labels, and, yes, wine writing and rating—the whole elaborate idea of wine—we would still get drunk, but we would be merely drunk. The language of wine appreciation is there not because wine is such a special subtle challenge to our discernment but because without the elaborate language—without the idea of wine, held up and regularly polished—it *would* all be about the same, or taste that way. Wine talk and wine ceremony are not simply snobbish distractions that lead us away from the real experience; they are part of what lets the experience happen. To turn wine away from happiness is the drinker's sin. A good fruity bottle of a Santa Barbara Pinot Noir, with a pretty label and a decent story, makes us happy, and happier than that we don't really deserve to be. In that James story, of course, the innocent empirical American's reward and punishment would come when he marries that *comtesse* and retires to her château, where they spend the rest of their lives drinking nothing but water, for their health. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

Spice, *by Jack Turner (Knopf; $26.95).* Turner arranges his history of spices thematically, in a series of lively essays on their role in different aspects of human endeavor, such as exploration (Columbus was looking for cinnamon when he discovered America) and love (a fifteenth-century tract prescribes an ointment of honey and ginger for "Increasing the Dimension of Small Members and Making Them Splendid"). Turner's sedulous research is manifest on every page, as he follows spices across cultures and eras, with allusions that range from St. Augustine to the Spice Girls. The book's unlikely hero is the peppercorn, which has linked East and West since the time of the Romans and which typifies the way that spices, although no longer the luxury items they once were, have become quietly ubiquitous. Cinnamon and nutmeg are rumored to be the key to "capitalism's most closely guarded secret," the formula for Coca-Cola.

Cooking for Kings, *by Ian Kelly (Walker; $26).* Antonin Carême was the most illustrious chef of post-Revolution France—Napoleon, the Rothschilds, and Tsar Alexander all employed him—and he is still remembered as the father of modern French cuisine, the popularizer of the soufflé, and the designer of the iconic chef's hat. Kelly charts Carême's use of food as a tool of social leverage, although he perhaps takes the self-promoting chef too much at his own estimation when he attributes the rise of the Rothschilds to their decision to hire Carême. Many of Carême's recipes appear here, but Kelly suggests that his more lasting legacy is the public figure of the celebrity chef. In Carême's dining rooms, ostentation often trumped taste. His signature dishes were elaborate replicas of classical architecture in pastry and spun sugar, held together with gum and colored with spinach. They were not intended for consumption.

Last Chance to Eat, *by Gina Mallet (Norton; $25.95).* This gourmand's polemic cum memoir may have an unoriginal premise—that cuisine is being ruined by the demise of the local producer, the spread of bland, chemically altered ingredients, and the influence of hysterical dietary fatwas—but Mallet's impatient scorn for anyone standing between her and the next scrumptious morsel is engaging. At times, it's easy to lose track of whether she's railing against the F.D.A., the food industry, nutritionists, environmentalists, or all of them, but her basic dictum is simple: taste rules. Mallet's strength lies in the sensual evocation of food; even a vegetarian might find pleasure in her rhapsody over the perfect steak. She saves her greatest encomiums for earthy, mammalian flavors that reflect their pastoral origins. An artisanal butter is a "six-ounce roll of golden bliss that melts on the tongue and warms the mouth with a hot, sexy, animal taste."

A Meal Observed, *by Andrew Todhunter (Knopf; $23).* In 1999, Todhunter and his wife had dinner at Taillevent, a three-star Paris restaurant;the evening was evidently so extraordinary that its description required an entire book. As the liturgy of the meal itself unfolds—from *gougère* to "Moelleux au Chocolat et au Thym"—Todhunter intersperses sketches of the establishment's various culinary magicians, disquisitions on French gastronomic lore, and dollops of memoir about the meals he ate growing up in America. The shtick of uncouth Americans cowed by French sophistication is a familiar one, but Todhunter plays it superlatively—the embarrassment suffered when specifying a price range to the sommelier, the maître d' "with a stride so liquid as to be indistinguishable from levitation"—and is appealingly unsnobbish. And he is eloquent about humbler repasts, sharing a sandwich with his dog, or cooking his wife a six-egg omelette after the difficult birth of their first child: "She ate like an animal that has been near death and is recovering."

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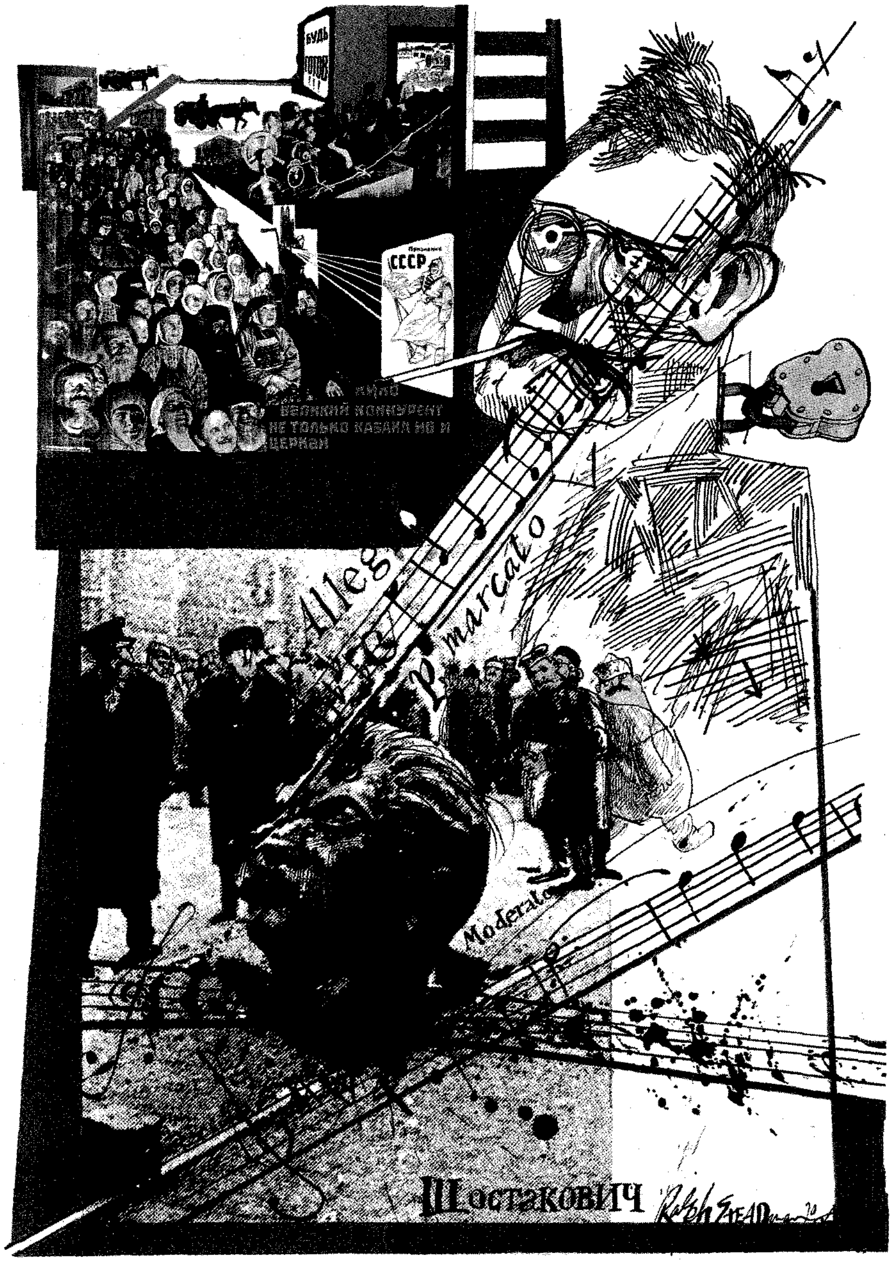
The final betrayal of Dmitri Shostakovich.

BY ALEX ROSS



At Bard's festival, Shostakovich was heard along with twenty other Soviet composers.

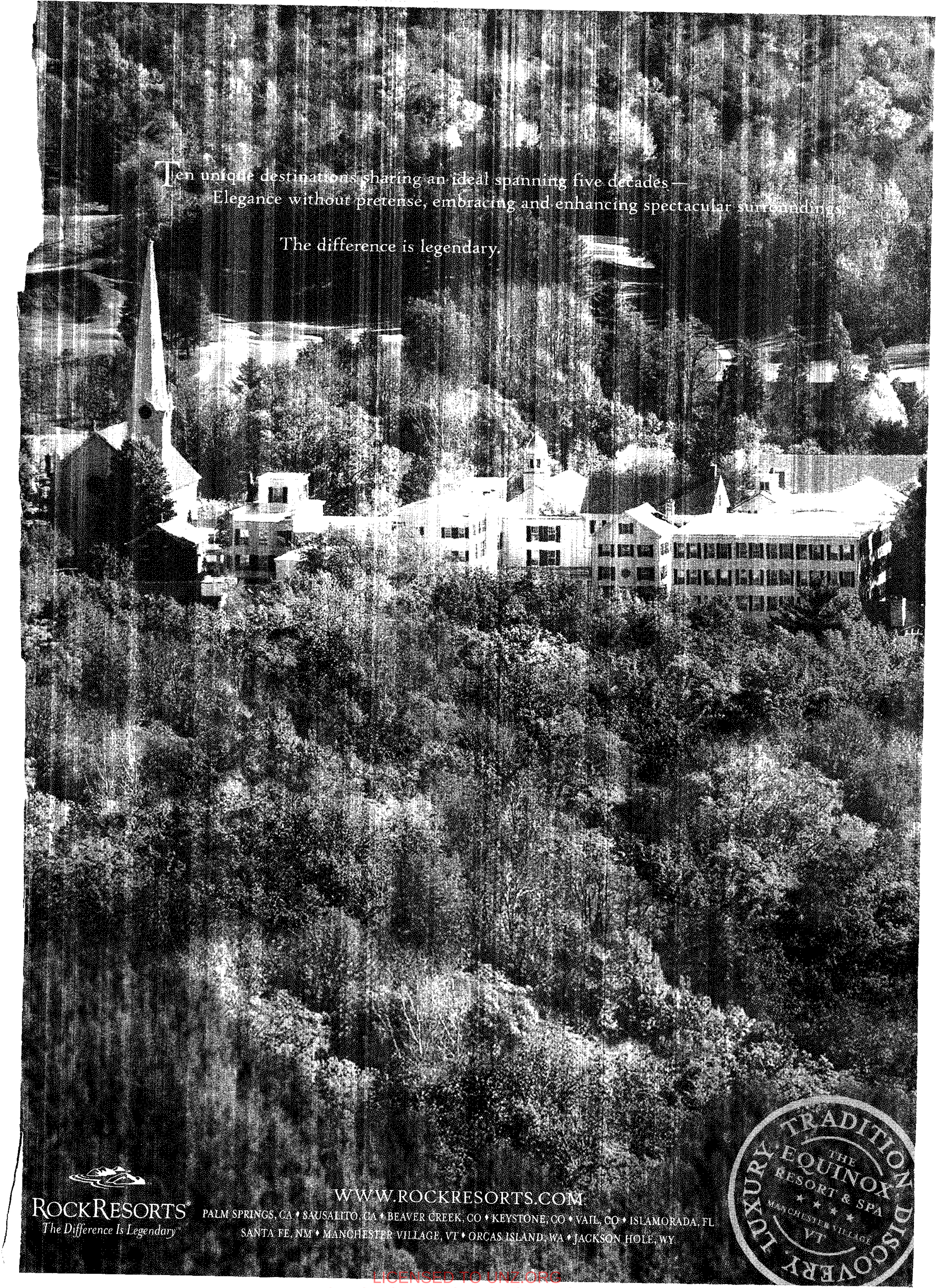
There are few documented examples of the fake or forged autobiography, although the genre probably has a long, secret history. Its most famous practitioner was Clifford Irving, who, in 1971, tried to publish the tell-all memoirs of Howard Hughes without telling Hughes. Irving's manuscript began with a brazen announcement that "more lies have been printed and told about me than about any living man" and that it was time for the "elusive, often painful truth." Irving made the mistake of releasing his manuscript while Hughes was still alive. Nothing kills an autobiography like a flat-out denial by the author.

In 1979, the Russian-émigré musicologist Solomon Volkov published "Testimony: The Memoirs of Dmitri Shostakovich as Related to and Edited by Solomon Volkov." It was a grippingly embittered monologue by the greatest of Soviet composers, denouncing Communism and chronicling a life lived in fear. In retrospect, something about the first page should have set off alarms. Like Irving's Hughes, Volkov's Shostakovich seems to protest too much. "Others will write about us," he says. "And naturally they'll lie through their teeth." This book would "speak the truth about the past"; "reminisce . . . only in the name of truth"; "try to tell only the truth."

The book arrived with impressive credentials. According to Volkov, each chapter had been read and signed by Shostakovich, who had died in 1975. Irving never met Hughes, but Volkov was acquainted with Shostakovich, and was known to have interviewed him. A year after publication, though, "Testimony" hit a snag. The American scholar Laurel Fay pointed out that seven of the eight chapters began with word-for-word quotations from older Shostakovich essays. Given that these pages bore Shostakovich's signature, it looked as if Volkov might have obtained the composer's approval under false pretenses—perhaps by showing him an innocuous collection of previously published material, then weaving the signed pages into a monologue of his own invention. Volkov never answered these charges, but other writers stepped in to defend him. The most persuasive argument, which I repeated in this magazine in 2000, was that Fay had found no borrowings on the first page of Chapter 1, which proclaimed the truth of the very book that was in the reader's hands.

A couple of years ago, Fay got hold of a copy of the Russian typescript of "Testimony." She has now reported her findings in Malcolm Hamrick Brown's new anthology, "A Shostakovich Casebook" (Indiana). There is no signature on the first page, it turns out; that claim was something other than the truth. Instead, there is a signature on the third page, which perfectly overlaps with a bland essay that Shostakovich published in 1966. Fay subjects the entire document to Sherlockian scrutiny, noting that a couple of the recycled pages had been doctored to remove datable references. A mention

RALPH STEADMAN



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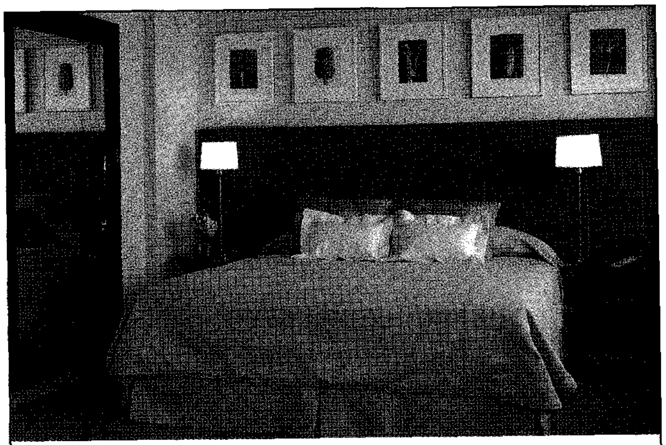

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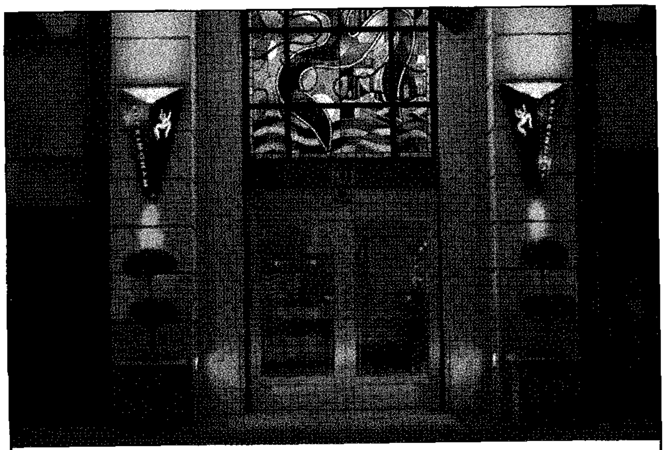

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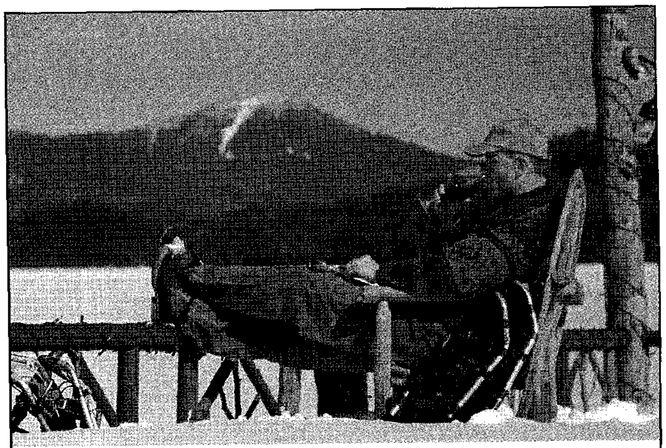

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THE POINT RELAIS & CHATEAUX. LAKE PLACID LODGE of the Chekhov centenary—"I am sincerely happy that the hundredth anniversary of his birth is attracting anew to him the attention of all progressive humanity"—disappears under correction tape. The American publishers could not easily check back issues of *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, where this statement originally appeared, but they might have noticed that a man allegedly interviewed in the seventies was suddenly speaking from the year 1960.

Recently, at a Shostakovich festival at Bard College, Fay spoke once more about "Testimony," which Limelight Editions has ill-advisedly reissued in a twenty-fifth-anniversary edition. She added new evidence to her suggestion that "Testimony" is a hoax: a memo, drafted by Shostakovich's friend Isaak Glikman shortly after "Testimony" was published, records Shostakovich, in the last months of his life, railing against the business of writing memoirs. Shostakovich is also quoted as saying, "What sort of a person is this Solomon Volkov?" The words hung in the air as Fay repeated them. You could almost hear the fear germinating in Shostakovich's harried mind: this Volkov character is hatching something. Glikman, by the way, is an unimpeachable witness, whose writings have been cited by Volkov's defenders and detractors alike.

Fay leaves little doubt that Shostakovich saw nothing of "Testimony" beyond the eight pages he signed. (I can imagine another, less likely scenario: the composer read the manuscript and refused to grant his approval, whereupon Volkov obtained the signatures by subterfuge.) Whether the composer made any of the statements attributed to him in Volkov's book is a trickier question. As Fay readily admits, many of the anecdotes and opinions have been corroborated by other sources; Volkov may have heard some from the composer, others from his friends. The musicologist Lev Lebedinsky, who liked to say that Shostakovich's symphonies were secret diatribes against the Soviet system, has been suggested as a secondary ghostwriter. It could well be that the bulk of the manuscript consists of things that Shostakovich did say at one time or another, in so many words. Some have shrugged their shoulders over the entire affair, saying that, yes, some hanky-panky went on, but that it doesn't matter in the end, because Volkov told little lies in order to convey a larger truth about Soviet music.

I don't buy that argument. It isn't enough for the memoirs of a major artist to have an ambience of authenticity. A book that subjected Picasso or Joyce to such manipulations would never have made it to publication. For some reason, though, music is treated as a childish realm in which fables serve as well as facts. Russian composers seem especially vulnerable to urban legends, as if facts mattered even less behind the old Iron Curtain. To dismiss Fay's evidence is to disregard a great artist's right to speak in his own voice. If Shostakovich had known what was going to be printed under his name, he might have hated Volkov with a passion that not even Joseph Stalin inspired in him.

For years, Volkov's book provoked nonsensically polarized arguments over whether Shostakovich was a Party ideologue or an anti-Communist dissident. The composer had long served as a caricature of Soviet nationalism; Volkov and his acolytes had now made him a puppet for the other side. The most effective "Volkovian" interpreter was Ian MacDonald, the author of a book entitled "The New Shostakovich," who, sadly, committed suicide last year. Perhaps the so-called "Shostakovich Wars" are ready to end, and a more evenhanded assessment can begin. The Bard festival, two weekends of concerts in which Shostakovich was heard along with twenty other Soviet composers, offered a sometimes confusing picture, but there was no doubt of the composer's vital appeal. Every performance at the splendid new Fisher Center was packed, and even 10 A.M. panels drew crowds.

In conjunction with the festival, Fay edited another new collection, entitled "Shostakovich and His World" (Princeton), which contains an illuminating essay by Leonid Maximenkov on the composer's relationship with Stalin. Stalin knew Shostakovich primarily as a film composer, and admired him on that count. He famously disliked Shostakovich's opera "Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk," which was denounced in *Pravda* in January of 1936. But there was no personal animus, as Volkov claims. The *Pravda* editorial spearheaded an attack on modernist tendencies which had been in preparation for months. As one *Pravda* editor remarked, the government targeted Shostakovich not because he was the worst of-

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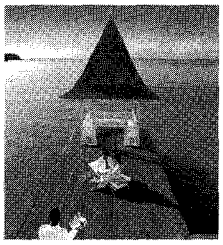

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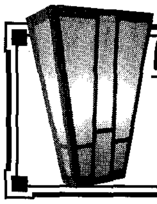

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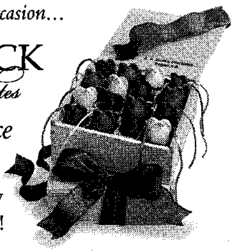

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fender but because he was deemed "worth saving." Transcripts of a meeting at the Kremlin show that Stalin simply wanted Shostakovich to stop writing "rebuses and riddles" and create a "clear mass art." Stalin was probably more interested in intelligence reports on what other cultural figures were saying. Those reports have been published in Russia, and they are deeply chilling. Two check marks were placed next to the name Abram Lezhnev, who denounced *Pravda's* Nazi-style tactics. He was shot in 1938.

When the *Pravda* editorial appeared, Shostakovich was starting work on the final movement of his Fourth Symphony. On the opening weekend of the Bard festival, Leon Botstein, a co-director of the event and the president of the college, conducted the American Symphony Orchestra in a performance of the Fourth; the tempos were rigid, but the effect was tremendous. The first two movements evoke a surreal landscape in which the late-Romantic symphony seems to have collapsed on itself, its grand themes supplanted by trivial material. The clobbered, staggering tone persists through much of the finale. Then, several minutes before the end, cellos and basses take up a low, chattering figure borrowed from Mahler's "Resurrection" Symphony, and an epiphany seems at hand. Soviet listeners would have expected a pageant of triumph after the struggle.

But when the bombastic major chords arrive they make a ghastly sound. The phalanx of brass seems to split apart and collide violently. As the musicologist Richard Taruskin has pointed out, there is a strong resemblance to the Gloria of Stravinsky's "Oedipus Rex," in which Jocasta is hailed as the queen of a "disease-ridden Thebes." After the aborted resurrection, a long recessional ensues, taking up two hundred and thirty-five dismal, monotonous bars. Nothing in music is quite as scary as this ending, for its aesthetic of catastrophe was tantamount to suicide. If the première of the Fourth had gone ahead as scheduled, in the fall of 1936, the composer might have met the same fate as Abram Lezhnev. At the last minute, however, he withdrew the symphony. In its place, he produced the angrily affirmative Fifth, and bought another forty years of life. Shostakovich's urge to defy authority was always tempered by an instinct for survival.

The Fourth Symphony was the only giant slab of Shostakovichian oratory on the festival's opening weekend. What we got, for the most part, was a refreshing emphasis on the sly, comic Shostakovich—the fidgety, neurotic, soccer-loving genius who had somehow retained his deadpan sense of humor even as Stalin's terrors unfolded around him. Zuill Bailey and Simone Dinnerstein gave a deeply felt, freely flowing performance of the 1934 Cello Sonata, in which Shostakovich simplified his language without help from *Pravda*. Melvin Chen gave a raw, roaring account of the First Piano Sonata. The Bard Festival Quartet avoided the usual doom-and-gloom in the Eleventh Quartet, finding an elusive balance of sweetness and sadness.

Best of all were two Shostakovich theatre events, presented as part of Bard's SummerScape series. One was Francesca Zambello's production of Shostakovich's 1959 operetta-musical "Moskva: Cheryomushki," or "Cherry Tree Towers," which has long had a dull reputation but came to life here as a witty, goofy, even touching affair. The plot, mildly subversive in its mention of Communist Party corruption, follows the love lives of young Soviets who are scrambling for apartments in a horrible new high-rise. The score is infested with satires and self-quotations, including a reprise of Shostakovich's greatest hit, the "Song of the Counterplan," which Stalin had mentioned approvingly in 1936. Lauren Skuce and Jonathan Hays were graceful and vivid in the romantic leads, but the show belonged to two Russian speakers—Andrei Antonov, as the gleefully corrupt superintendent, and Makvala Kasrashvili, wielding her luxurious soprano to comic effect in the role of the gold-digger Vava. They tore up the stage with the joy of performers liberated from convention.

The other Shostakovich show of the summer was "The Nose," based on Gogol's absurdist tale. Zambello again directed, creating a simulacrum of early radical Soviet theatre, with its abstract designs and madcap movement. A large cast, Antonov and Kasrashvili among them, performed with zany high spirits. Instead of pondering the music, these singers relished its pleasures and its dangers, its precarious balance between profundity and kitsch, its love of life and its yen for death. An epigram of Karl Kraus's flashed through my mind: "You don't even live once." ♦

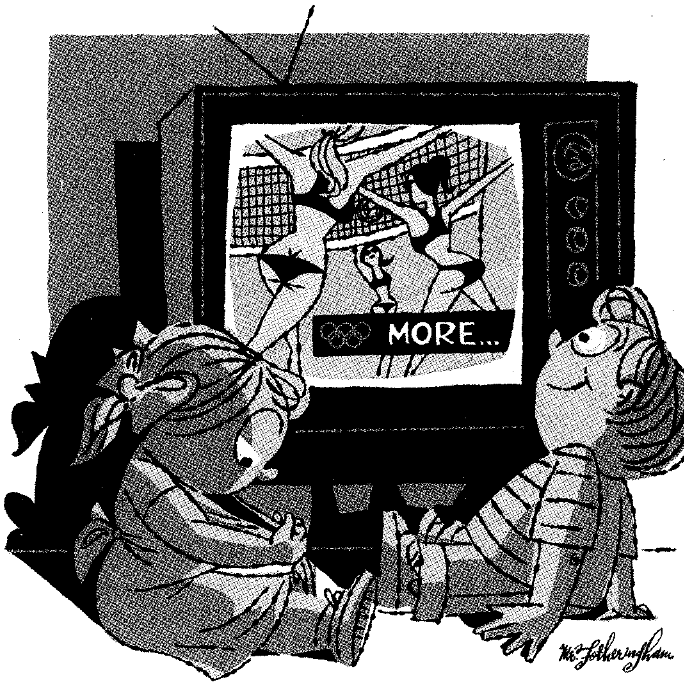
ON TELEVISION

CITY OF GLUTES

An Olympic homecoming.

BY NANCY FRANKLIN

All bad things—car alarms, the wait at Starbucks, dental work—go on forever, but good things inevitably come to an end. And so the Olympics are over. Like every Olympic fortnight, this one produced stories and images that will stay in viewers' minds for years to come, but, luckily, at least by the middle of last week, none of those images were associated with bombs or guns or any other form of terrorism. The billion and a half dollars that was spent on security during the Games paid off, and NBC's announcers, for their part, helpfully refrained from referring to the issue and increasing the unspoken anxiety in the air. But, as always, there were plenty of other things—mistakes, outrages, the quality of the coverage, as well as performances both amazing and heartbreaking—for members of Team La-Z-Boy to chew over.



The Games of summer: bodies beautiful hit the beach in Greece.

EDWIN FOTHERINGHAM

One maddening question that kept occurring to me during the first week could be answered definitively, and, I'm happy to say, in the affirmative, by last Tuesday night: yes, there *is* an end to beach-volleyball coverage. We all have our opinions about why certain pastimes are better than others, and why some sports aren't even real sports. So maybe you think that beach volleyball isn't just "Girls Gone Wild" with scorekeeping. Fine. I'm not prepared to argue with its legitimacy—only with its ubiquity. Was there a single women's match that wasn't covered? NBC must have been determined to show at least one sport in which contestants competed in the nude, in order to replicate the atmosphere of the ancient Games, and beach volleyball was the obvious choice. It can't really be so, but it did seem that the skimpier the outfit the greater the chance its wearer would be seen in prime time. Gymnasts, swimmers, divers, beach-volleyball babes—for the first ten days of the Olympics, Athens was the city of glutes. Four years ago, there was talk of the performance-enhancing qualities of the suits worn by some of the swimmers, such as the Australian Ian Thorpe; but, this year, no one seemed to remark on the strange contours of some of the men's getups, particularly that of Michael Phelps, whose suit covered his legs completely, but on its way up to his torso stopped abruptly below the mid-gluteal range. If you've ever found yourself wearing a pair of tights that were too short—one of the all-time great ways to ruin a day—you couldn't help marvelling at Phelps's ability to concentrate on his job.

NBC had a golden opportunity at these Games, though there were some cavillers who would deprive the network of a medal. Since the Sydney Olympics, in 2000, NBC has acquired Telemundo, Bravo, and the USA Network, doubling the number of its channels, and it broadcast twelve hundred hours of the Athens Games—three times what it was able to show four years ago on the flagship network, CNBC, and MSNBC. Though complaints about the television coverage were less loud this year than they were four years ago—when the fifteen-hour time difference between Sydney and the East Coast of the United States (the only coast that anyone cares about when time delays are discussed) made all the results very old news by the time the competitions were shown on TV—some viewers didn't appreciate the prime-time events' being chopped up and drawn out until the end of the evening broadcast, at midnight. By turning on the TV at random times throughout the day and flipping around among NBC's outlets, you could catch a lot of Olympics, but somehow it was still too easy to miss parts of competitions you very much wanted to see. And, once those events had passed, they were gone forever. I missed the women's hundred-metre hurdles semifinal, in which the great runner Gail Devers failed to finish—failed almost to start, because a leg injury caused her to drop out of the race before the first hurdle—and I never got to see a replay of it. But I discovered, midway through the Games, that you could see video highlights on NBC's Olympics Web site. (This feature had a catch, though—while it was free, it was available only to Visa cardholders.)

The Internet is partly what caused people to become impatient with the Sydney Games. We already *know* what happened, the whining went. It was on the *Web*. But this time around the Web, which is now as integral to our lives as our television sets, served as a well-stocked convenience store for viewers who couldn't spend seventy hours a day in front of the TV. NBC's site supplied a full array of results, athlete bios, detailed schedules, fun facts, and archived stories

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(and, of course, stuff for sale). While watching the gymnastics, I kept waiting for one of the announcers to explain what the story was behind the strange-looking new vaulting equipment, but I had to go to the Web site to find the answer. Fun facts were not entirely missing from the broadcasts, though—I am here to tell you that shuttlecocks can travel at two hundred miles per hour and smash your teeth.

The demand for everything-on-demand created by the digital revolution won't be quieted by NBC's near-blanket broadcast of the Games, and the network may feel obliged to experiment with a different model the next time around, perhaps offering pay-per-view coverage for viewers who want to see every single fencing match or every sailing race. As it is, digital video recorders have already changed the relationship between viewers and advertisers; one person I know who watched prime-time coverage of the Games every night saw no commercials—he recorded the broadcasts on his DVR and simply waited until about half an hour into the proceedings to begin watching, so that he could fast-forward through all the ads. Office Depot, A.T. & T. Wireless, and McDonald's will be disappointed to find out that, as a result, he is not *so* set for school, has no idea how many bars he has, and is not prepared to defend his chicken.

Americans made up by far the largest contingent of athletes in Athens, and won the most medals, but jingoism was not much in evidence. Even the version of "The Star-Spangled Banner" that was used had its low-key moments; an ethereal-sounding strings-only interlude sneaked its way in among the brass and the cymbals, and its improbable loveliness gave you real chills—and chills are what we tune in to the Olympics for. It's not possible to watch two weeks' worth of performances by athletes of Olympic calibre without having your capacity to be thrilled and inspired enlarged, especially as you get older and there is not much about your own life that is gravity-defying. That expansive spirit affects the athletes, too, most of whom say that they're grateful just to be able to participate. And, unlike the movie stars who say that it's an honor just to be nominated for an Academy Award, they seem to mean it. For one thing, they know that, talented as they may be, a sprained thumb or a stiff neck can cancel out years of training and preparation. And, even if they get to the Games, life keeps right on being unfair. Just ask the Russian hurdler who was knocked over by the hurdler next to her and lost her chance to even finish the race, let alone win a medal.

Bad judging and the fallout from illegal doping were the only sour notes of this Olympics, and the latter was no surprise, since for years now the road to the Olympics has been littered with steroidally questionable athletes. This year, even the opening ceremonies were tainted by illegal drugs; the Greek sprinter who was meant to light the cauldron was axed from the Games because he had missed a mandatory test. And, given the historical and symbolic significance of setting the women's shot-put competition at Olympia, it was depressing to hear, a couple of days later, that the winner had tested positive for steroids and had to give back her medal.

As for the bungled judging and the bungled filing of complaints, and the effect that these had on the athletes—all this is a standard part of athletic competition at every level and always has been, and one of the jobs of an athlete is to learn to accept the elements of competition that are out of his control. Good sportsmanship isn't simply a matter of having a stiff upper lip, as suggested in the famous Kipling quote about triumph and disaster that is inscribed above the entrance to Wimbledon's Centre Court; you have to go through serious disappointment to get sportsmanship right, which is why we find it fully as moving as any medal-winning performance. But let's be real: bad judging—well, it just *stinks*, no getting around it.

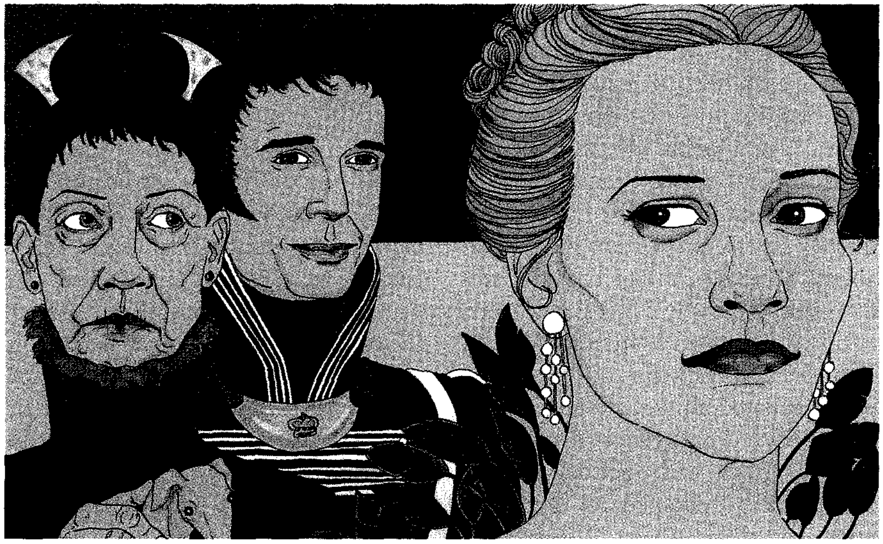
There is so much glory to be had at the Olympics—good, unironic glory—that all of us get to bask in it for two weeks. We're reluctant to let the glow fade, but it's also a relief when the Games are over. It turns out that a little glory every few years is quite enough; all that rooting, heart-pounding, and breath-holding is exhausting. It's time to move on, and time to return to the other race that's been running concurrently with the Games in Athens: the two-fisted Swift-boat competition. ♦

THE CURRENT CINEMA

POWER PLAYS

"Vanity Fair" and "Hero."

BY ANTHONY LANE



Eileen Atkins, James Purefoy, and Reese Witherspoon in Mira Nair's movie.

LARA TOMLIN

No film of "Vanity Fair" can be true to Thackeray's novel, nor should it be. Bad faith, with occasional slivers of good, was his most pullulating theme, and woe betide any director who dogs the book with devotion. Better by far to fool around with it and grab what turns you on. The novel will be with us forever, but the movie is a one-night stand.

Spinning at the hub of the story is Becky Sharp (Reese Witherspoon). In the eyes of the early nineteenth century, she is a nobody, possessed of nothing more than brains, beauty, bilingualism, a fine dress sense, a lashing wit, the sexual heat of a lioness, and the singing voice of a lark. And what are such fripperies, pray, without an income of five thousand a year? The film, like the book, follows Becky's determination to find a fortune and hence become a somebody. She tags along with Amelia Sedley (Romola Garai), her best (or most serviceable) friend, sliding glossily into the Sedley household and almost into the heart of Amelia's brother Jos (Tony Maudsley). Jos's heart is dear to him, being tolerably near to his stomach, yet he rebuffs the temptress, on the glowering advice of George Osborne (Jonathan Rhys Meyers), Amelia's intended. That, anyway, is the movie's explanation; Thackeray, more stoutly, removed Jos from the scene by the simple expedient of getting him drunk on punch. Love dies before a hangover.

Round Two, and Becky, as a governess, enters the enchanted circle of the Crawleys, who hail from one of the most distinguished and flyblown rumps of the aristocracy. Sir Pitt Crawley (Bob Hoskins), who molders away in a rural mansion, has one stiff son, Pitt (Douglas Hodge), and one loose one, Rawdon (James Purefoy). There is also a wicked old bat of an aunt, Matilda (Eileen Atkins), on the mysteries of whose forthcoming will the family drools and hangs. Any American viewer who still harbors glamorous fantasies about the British upper class will be cured, once and for all, by ten minutes among the Crawleys. If the foul Scotch broth served at dinner, and announced as "Potage de Mouton à l'Écossaise," doesn't do the trick, the sight of Matilda Crawley removing her wig and scratching at the wispy pate beneath, presumably in search of noble fleas, should mark the official closing of a dream.

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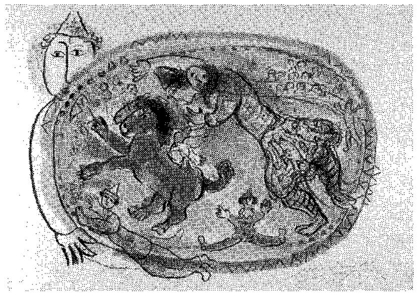

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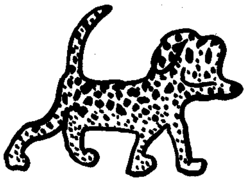
ments. Such is the vinegar that runs in the author's veins that neither of his leading ladies is honored with a satisfactory wedding. Becky hooks up with Rawdon, Amelia with George, and both men are cut off from their inheritance—indeed, George's name is elided from the Osborne family Bible, his social death prefiguring his actual demise in the Battle of Waterloo. Something dies, too, in the movie in the aftermath of war. Amelia fades like a flower, to be revived at the finale by the loyal Major Dobbin (Rhys Ifans), while Becky continues her ascent, the value of which is in directly inverse proportion to its desirability. Freezing out her husband and, far worse, their only child, she falls prey to the dark-browed Marquess of Steyne (Gabriel Byrne), who glitters thickly with the boredom that attends incalculable wealth. His revered name is pronounced "stain," and, once he has oozed into Becky's existence, he cannot be washed away.



The deviser of these niceties is Mira Nair, the Indian director, educated at Harvard, who brought us "Salaam Bombay!" and "Monsoon Wedding." She is more qualified than most for the task of transplanting Thackeray to the screen, being blessed with a contemporary, as opposed to a historical, grasp of the comical oppressions in which he dealt. I had great difficulty convincing friends that the crux of "Monsoon Wedding"—a young Indian flying home from Houston, Texas, to an arranged marriage—was remotely plausible these days, whereas nothing about it, apart from the airplanes, would have been news to Thackeray. He himself was born in India, in 1811, leaving at the age of five; his grandfather and his father had both toiled there in the service of the Empire. The father had an Indian or Eurasian mistress, a practice that was common enough to be tolerated in Anglo-Indian society. They had an illegitimate daughter, who, on her father's death, received the same annuity as her half brother. No wonder Thackeray grew up to mock the easily scandalized.

That is the kind of story that Mira Nair would love to tell, and "Monsoon Wedding" remains, if anything, a more lively embodiment of the Thackeray spirit—of his need to scourge all that enticed him—than her version of "Vanity Fair." The fact that she chooses to end the new film with the swaying backside of an elephant suggests that she is cocking an oversized snook at the awfulness of England. When she and her designers cloak and saturate English life—in its metropolitan haunts, if not its country dumps—with a deep-hued swagger, it is not so much to make a point about the importing of foreign styles as to render a drab nation more worthy of its iridescent colonies. Thus, the curry at the Sedleys' (which is in the book) is served by a half-naked Indian servant (who is not); the gentlemen's costumes, military as well as civilian, are plumped and sleeked to a gaudiness that is but a stitch away from the cartoonish; Lord Steyne is so richly robed that he could be a rug merchant, bearing his own products upon his person at all times; while the charade that Becky performs for the delectation of His Lordship is transformed into an Indian "Showgirls" routine, the guests bewitched by a blur of Regency babes.

All of which is smart, saucy, and ingenious in the extreme. The trouble is that when a subtext is dragged to the fore, however splendidly, the poor old text gets lost. There is no denying the novel's nods toward the East, but nods they remain; the reek that rises from the saga of Becky, Amelia, and their menfolk is less that of unknown spice than the familiar whiff of boiled beef. When Thackeray's Dobbin heads for India, he discovers the "boisterous dullness of the mess-table"; Nair's Dobbin, by contrast, turns into a sort of early-model George Harrison, complete with transcendental hair. Meanwhile, in the roles of Rawdon and George, James Purefoy and Jonathan Rhys Meyers are as handsome as Thackeray intended; but he also made plain that theirs is a heavy handsomeness, replete with billiards, booze, and cards. Watching these two, I could believe them as seducers, but not for a minute as soldiers; they have been Byronized, in keeping with the movie's sweet tooth for the mysterious, just as Becky's carolling at the piano is changed from Mozart, on the page, to a moody performance of "Now sleeps the crimson petal." How clever of Miss Sharp to make use of a poem of Tennyson's that would not be published for another thirty years, but then she always was ahead of her time.

Like the "Harry Potter" movies, this "Vanity Fair" is rabid with English character actors—if Bob Hoskins is suitably surly as Sir Pitt, Tim Preece is oddly moving as his dishevelled old valet, Horrocks, whose wig gives the impression that a sheep has landed on his head and lately died. Some of the other figures, however, strike me as little more than cogs in a vicious cultural machine, whereas Thackeray's bit players are resolutely rife with life. Open the book—subtitled "A Novel Without a Hero"—and you feel yourself jostled by waiters, colonels, spiteful schoolboys, and duchesses with hearts of flint. The author began as a journalist, and there are times when his masterpiece, especially as it dips into the present tense, seems less like fiction and more like the best newspaper ever printed; it barely boasts a plot, preferring to jam and paste its scraps of superior gossip until they furnish the illusion that a tale is being told.

If there is no hero, what of the heroine? Well, should you count the number of pages, out of some eight hundred, on which Becky Sharp deigns to appear, you would be shocked at her rarity. That is a deep problem for the movie; I couldn't name you a better Becky than Reese Witherspoon, and Thackeray would have hymned the tilt of her nose, but her history drifts like gunsmoke across our vision, and there are times, as we are tracking Dobbin, or Amelia, or the tribulations of the Osbornes—which could scarcely be more traumatic if the great Ozzy himself were to show up in a frock coat—when the thought of Becky recedes. At the risk of being brutal, I would say that the Witherspoon of "Legally Blonde," a far more bubbleheaded picture, was not merely sharper but Sharper than her Becky. She hogged the screen, and that is as it should be; a twenty-first-century movie is more hierarchical, even more hidebound, than the great Victorian sagas, which liked to parcel out their scorn and affection with democratic zest. If there's one thing more perilous than a novel without a hero, it's a movie without a star.

The joke is that "Vanity Fair" is only the second most luscious film of the moment. Set beside "Hero," it seems positively grimy. "Hero" is the latest movie from Zhang Yimou, who made his name with "Ju Dou," "Raise the Red Lantern," and other master classes in color coördination. This is his leap into grandeur: an epic set before the birth of Christ, in a China that was then divided into seven kingdoms. The most potent leader, the King of Qin, welcomes a young man known as Nameless (Jet Li). Nameless has defeated the three assassins who have menaced the King's life. Their names are Flying Snow (Maggie Cheung), Broken Sword (Tony Leung), and plain old Sky (Donnie Yen).

The story is at once complicated, fragile, and beside the point. We get flashbacks to the slaying of each assassin, followed by contradictory flashbacks, each of them shot in different tones—no, it didn't happen like *this*, in red and orange; it happened like *that*, in steel blue. Such schematic artistry may sound precious; in the event, I am merely felled and winded by the outrageous beauty of the result. The director of photography is Christopher Doyle, and he has decided to subvert the laws governing time, space, weather, and bloodshed. Two women, for instance, enjoy an autumnal swordfight; at first, the yellow leaves swirl prettily around them, but soon the swirl responds to the fighters' moves, and by the end we are revelling in the creation of a new genre—the violent pastoral. Earlier, Flying Snow—or, as I prefer to think of her, Angry Lipgloss—defends a remote calligraphy school (what else?) against massed ranks of archers, many of whom sit on their behinds and operate an unusual combination of crossbow and rowing machine. The arrows, like millions of pencil strokes, rewrite the sky, but our heroine repels them with a swish of her scarlet robe. This proves to the assembled calligraphers that the pen is mightier than the sword, but that neither of them is mightier than chiffon.

Try not to ponder the movie's end. Here we learn that the King, freed from threat, went on to conquer the other provinces and establish a unified China. What we have been watching, in other words, is a national epic, which spends an hour and a half preaching the stylishness of near-bloodless combat only to close with a paean to tyrannical rule. This is peculiar stuff from Zhang Yimou, whose abrasive relations with Beijing led to an official attempt to pull "Ju Dou" from the Oscar nominations for best foreign film. What has happened since? Have conditions for Chinese artists improved that much? Or does the dreamed loveliness of "Hero," caught between dance and trance, come at an uncomfortable price? ♦

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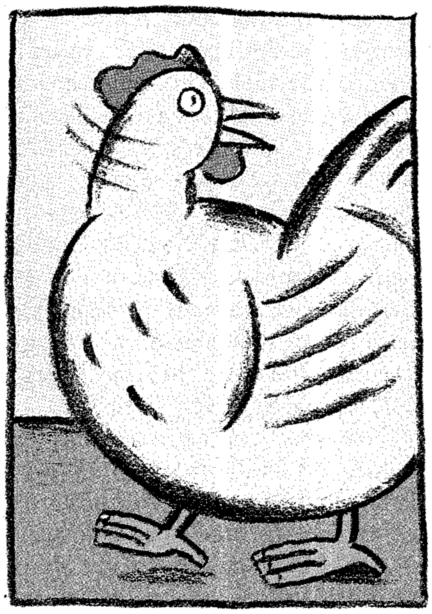
COOKING LESSONS

KILLING DINNER

It's quite something to go barehanded up through a chicken's ass and dislodge its warm guts. Startling, the first time, how fragilely they are attached. I have since put countless suckling pigs—pink, the same weight and size as a pet beagle—into slow ovens to roast overnight so that their skin becomes crisp and their still forming bones melt into the meat. I have butchered two-hundred-and-twenty-pound sides of beef down to their primal cuts; carved the tongues out of the heads of goats; fastened baby lambs with crooked sets of teeth onto green applewood spits and set them by the foursome over hot coals; and boned the saddles and legs of rabbits, which, even skinned, look exactly like bunnies.

But when I killed my first chicken I was only seventeen and unaccustomed. I had dropped out of school and was staying in the basement of my father's house, in rural New Jersey, for very little rent. That fall, I spent a lot of time sitting outside on the log pile at dusk smoking hand-rolled cigarettes in my canvas jacket, watching the garden decay and thinking about death and the inherent beauty of the cycle of life. In my father's chicken coop, one bird was being badly henpecked. My dad said we should kill it and spare it the slow torture by its pen mates. I said I could do it. I said it was important to confront the death of the animal you had the privilege of eating, that it was cowardly to buy cellophane-wrapped packages of boneless, skinless breasts at the grocery store. My father said, "You can kill the damned thing when I get home from work."

From a remote spot on the back kitchen steps, he told me how to pull the chicken decisively out of the pen. I spoke to it philosophically about death, grasping it firmly yet calmly with what I hoped was a soothing authority. Then he told me to take it by the legs and hold it upside down. The chicken protested from deep inside its throat, close to the heart, a violent, vehement, full-bodied cluck. The crowing was almost an afterthought. To get it to stop, I started swinging it in full arm circles, as my dad instructed me. I windmilled that bird around and around the way I'd spun lettuce as a kid in the front yard, sending droplets of water out onto the gravel and pachysandra from the old-fashioned wire-basket spinner my mom used.



SEYMOUR CHWAST

He said this would disorient the bird—make it so dizzy that it couldn't move—and that's when I should lay it down on the block and chop its head off, with one machinelike whack. In my own way, not like a machine at all, I laid it down on a tree stump, and while it was trying to recover I clutched the hatchet and came down on its neck. This first blow made a vague dent, barely breaking the skin. I hurried to strike it again, but lost a few seconds in my grief and horror. The second blow hit the neck like a boat oar on a hay bale. I was still holding its feet in one hand and trying to cut its head off with the dull hatchet in my other when both the chicken and my father became quite lucid, and not a little agitated. The chicken began to thrash, its eyes open, as if chastising me for my false promises of a merciful death. My dad yelled, "Kill it! Kill it! Aw, Gabs, kill the fucking thing!" from his bloodless perch. I kept coming down on the bird's throat—which was now broken but still issuing terrible clucks—stroke after miserable stroke, until I finally got its head off. I was blubbering through clenched teeth. My dad was animated with disgust at his dropout daughter—so morose and unfeminine, with the tips of her braids dyed aquamarine, and unable even to kill a chicken properly. As I released the bird, finally, and it ran around the yard, bloody and ragged but at least now silent, he screamed, "What kind of person are you?"

It was a solid minute before the chicken's nerves gave out and it fell over motionless in some dead brown leaves. I wiped my snot on my sleeve, picked up the bird from the frozen ground, tied its feet, and hung it on a low tree branch to bleed it. The other chickens in their pen, silhouetted against the dusk, retreated inside to roost for the night. My dad closed the kitchen door and turned on the oven. I boiled a blue enamelled lobster pot full of water, and submerged the bird to loosen its feathers. Sitting out on the back steps in the yellow pool of light from the kitchen window, I plucked the feathers off the chicken, two and three at a time. Its viscera came out with an easy tug: a small palmful of livery, bloody jewels that I tossed out into the dark yard.

There are two things you should never do with your father: learn how to drive, and learn how to kill a chicken. I'm not sure you should sit across from each other and eat the roasted bird in resentful silence, either, but we did that, too, and the meat was disagreeably tough.

—*Gabrielle Hamilton*

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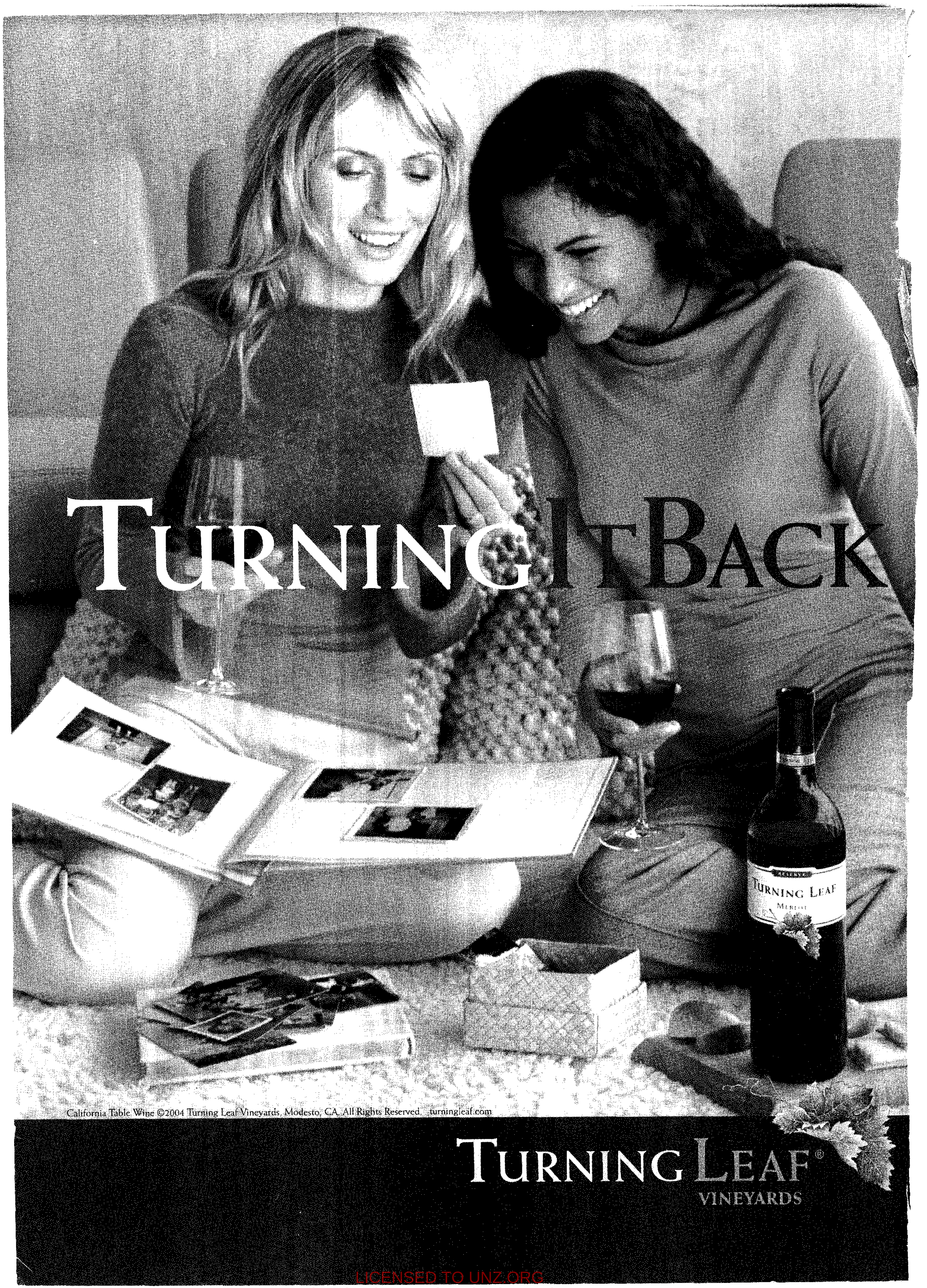

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